



Trip to Berlin and EDXC Conference 2012

Report by Alan Pennington © British DX Club



This year's European DX Council (EDXC) conference was held in Germany between 30th May and 4th June, at a rural hotel in a forest between Berlin and Leipzig in what used to be, until 1990, the GDR. But as Dave Kenny and I were flying into Berlin Tegel airport, it gave us a chance to spend a couple of days seeing something of the German capital before taking the train south.

Berlin

We were fortunate in having an expert guide in Richard Measham, whom Dave had worked with at BBC Monitoring, who was in Berlin at the time and knows the city very well. His familiarity with the Berlin transport system (and German language) enabled us to see quite a lot in just a couple of days! An all day ticket (Tageskarte) enabling travel by bus, tram, overground and underground train and even ferry boat for just €6.30 (£5) seemed a bargain! Our first Berlin landmark was the Reichstag, now the seat of the German parliament again following reunification, though perhaps best remembered for the photo of Red Army soldiers raising the Soviet flag on its ruins in April



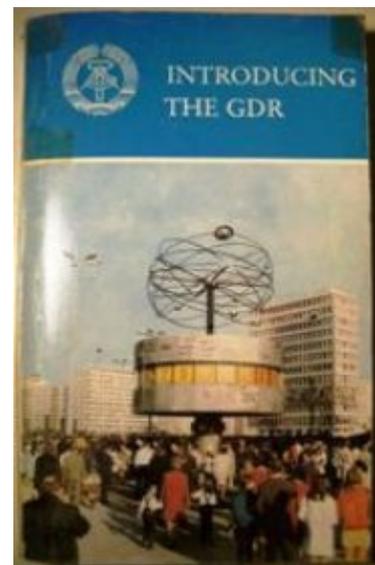
1945. A short walk away, in one of Berlin's many green spaces, was the Soviet War Memorial to their dead in the Battle of Berlin, dominated by a large statue of a Russian soldier carrying a child, and still guarded by two T-34 tanks.

Another, more poignant memorial, we saw close to the Friedrichstrasse U-Bahn station. This bronze statue of two groups of children "Trains to life: Trains to death" commemorated the more than 10,000 Jewish children who left on trains for the UK (without their parents) in 1938-1939, thus escaping the Nazi concentration camps.

Walking east took us through the famous Brandenburg Gate (and into former East Berlin) then along Unter den Linden towards the TV Tower (Berliner Fernsehturm) on Alexanderplatz, the centre of the former East German capital. A very popular attraction, despite the €12 entry ticket, with its panoramic views of the city from 203 metres up following a rapid lift ascent (see <http://www.tv-turm.de/en/panorama.php> for a full 360° view). The full height of the tower to the tip of the antenna is 368 metres (virtually the same as the Riga TV tower we visited in 2008) and it was the pride of the GDR capital when it opened in October 1969. The tower's location is said to have been chosen to impose on views on West Berlin's Reichstag. Today it radiates a host of

FM radio, Digital radio and Digital TV channels. While tuning around in our hotel (Best Western Kantstrasse), we could hear two English language FM stations: BBC World Service on 94.8 MHz (not 90.2 as the BBC website still lists and which now carries children's station 'Radio Teddy!') and NPR on 104.1 MHz (neither is transmitted from the TV tower though). Only three mediumwave channels were strong in the hotel: 693 kHz Voice of Russia (from Zehlendorf), 990 kHz Deutschlandkultur (from Berlin Britz, parallel to strong 177 kHz LW from Zehlendorf) plus 855 kHz carrying DRM hash (also from Berlin Britz).

Down at ground level in Alexanderplatz, I was pleased to see the World Clock was still in situ. This clock was pictured on the front cover of the “Introducing the GDR”, a 272-page book I had received from Radio Berlin International (RBI) in 1974, after asking them a geographical question! Like the TV tower, the clock had been added to the square in 1969. We also wondered if we could see the former RBI radio building at Nalepastrasse 18-50, but it was too far away to visit in the time we had, in south-east Berlin, and not near any station.



The Alexanderplatz World Clock today (left) and in 1974 (above - on the cover of a book from RBI). It gives the time in various world cities. During its restoration in 1997, apparently some cities were added which had been originally left off for political reasons (such as Jerusalem, Cape Town and St Petersburg).

Dave had visited Berlin in 1977 with German BDXC member Thomas Huckemann so had memories of crossing from West into East Berlin for a day-trip. Nowadays there's not much to be seen of the wall that divided the city between 1961 and 1989. In Potsdamer Platz there were a few metres of wall together with a stall where you could get an “Original DDR Visa” stamped in your passport (should you so desire). Nearby, Sony's 1000m² flagship store devoted just a small area to radios with only one or two analogue models, the rest DAB and DAB+ radios. Prices were similar to the UK (a Sony XDR-S56BDP DAB/DAB+/FM portable was €65 - £49 here in the UK).

The next day, after a trip to the 1936 Olympic stadium, we saw some more of Berlin's radio landmarks. Towering over one side of Theodor-Heuss-Platz was the modern grey block of RBB (Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg), the public regional broadcaster for the states of Berlin and Brandenburg. RBB was formed in 2003 with the merger of Sender Freis Berlin and ORB (Potsdam). As well as TV, RBB has seven different radio stations on the air on FM, DAB+, Satellite and cable: Antenne Brandenburg (light music), Fritz (youth), Inforadio (news), Kulturradio (culture), Radio Berlin 88.8 (local), Radio Eins (dance/rock/pop) and Funkhaus Europa (multi-cultural). The RBB Berlin building houses studios of Radio Berlin, Kulturradio and Inforadio 93.1 (other stations' studios are in Potsdam, south-west of Berlin). After a visit to the RBB shop we headed down Masurenallee, past the red and white RBB flags promising “good programmes for your licence fee”. In contrast to the modern RBB tower block, adjacent to it was the imposing dark tiled facade of the modernist “Haus des Rundfunks”, a purpose-built broadcasting house inaugurated in 1931. Viewed from above (as we would later – see photo below) it is actually triangular in shape. It was the HQ of the Third Reich's broadcasting network and was also the place where Germany's first TV service started in 1935. After WWII, it was

occupied by the Red Army and was used by the Soviet controlled Berliner Rundfunk radio station, even though it was located in the British zone of West Berlin. After being handed back by the Russians in 1956, it became the home of Sender Freies Berlin (which merged into RBB in 2003). You can take a virtual tour of the interior of the building at <http://www.haus-des-rundfunks.de/>. There is also a good RBB website with photos and audio giving the history of “Cold War Radio” (“Kalter Krieg im Radio”) in Berlin 1945-1994 at: <http://www.kalter-krieg-im-radio.de/> (Click on ‘Die Sender’ for radio stations East and West)



Across the road from the “Haus des Rundfunks”, in the Berlin trade fair grounds, is the 150m high “Funkturm” (Radio Tower). Built in 1926 for the Great German Radio Exhibition, it was originally designed as a support tower for a medium-wave T antenna and sits on porcelain insulators, but later had a restaurant and observation deck added. A €5 ticket gets you a lift ride up to the 125m high observation platform with views of western Berlin and beyond. In March 1935, the first regular TV programme in the world was broadcast

from the tower. The tower ceased being used for TV transmissions in 1962 and for radio broadcasts in 1973, but is still used for mobile phone etc and is a listed structure.

We returned to the city centre to catch our train south to the EDXC Conference, having seen a lot of Berlin in just two days, thanks to Richard. We would return briefly to the city after the conference en route to the airport to catch our flight home.

EDXC Conference – Ochsenkopf – 30 May to 5 June

Our train journey south from Berlin to Lutherstadt Wittenberg took an hour and a quarter, then a 15km taxi ride took us to Hotel Landgut Ochsenkopf in the wooded Duebener Heide Naturpark

<http://www.naturpark-duebener-heide.com>



Already outside in the hotel courtyard some delegates had congregated to chat and even begin to scan the bands! As well as the formal agenda, the most important part of the EDXC conferences for us is to meet old friends and make new ones amongst the DXers from around Europe and further afield. The European DX Council (EDXC) is an umbrella organisation for European DX clubs founded in 1967 – it currently has twelve Full Member clubs and four Observer Member clubs. BDXC is one of the Observer Members. Nowadays the EDXC's main activity is organising these annual events

with talks and presentations on hobby related topics plus additional trips around the conference venue. This year's conference was hosted by the Rhein-Main Radio Club (RMRC) and the Danish DSWCI club was also holding its AGM at the same time. There were around fifty DXers at the conference (plus some spouses) from Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, Ukraine and United Kingdom. We were pleased to meet BDXC member George Brown from Scotland again, who was the only other delegate from the UK and who is a regular at these EDXC conferences! The conference proceedings were mainly in English, and where talks or tours were in German, additional English translations were added. However, the Hotel staff spoke only German (and maybe Russian as a second language as Ochsenkopf used to be in East Germany) so we were glad of help from other DXers in translating the menu and ordering the right beer etc!

On Thursday morning, the EDXC flag was formerly raised outside the hotel before we set out on the first of three excursions to UNESCO World Heritage sites in the region – to the 18th century English-style naturalistic landscaped gardens at Wörlitz (<http://www.woerlitz-information.de/>)



Over the next two days we would visit two more UNESCO World Heritage sites: the historic town of Lutherstadt Wittenberg, where nearly 500 years ago Martin Luther nailed his “95 Theses” to the church door thus beginning the Reformation. <http://www.wittenberg.de/> and in contrast, a third excursion to the industrial town of Dessau, from where the Bauhaus School made a big impact on 20th century Modernist design of architecture, furniture etc 1926-1933. (www.bauhaus-dessau.de)

The conference was officially opened on Thursday afternoon by current EDXC Secretary-General Tibor Szilagyi (who was stepping down after six years in this role). Conference organiser, Dr Harald Gabler of the RMRC then spoke about “EDXC yesterday, today and tomorrow” and questioned whether there was still a need for the EDXC? Personally I think it would be a backward step if these unique conferences which bring together DXers from around Europe stopped as a result of the EDXC’s demise. Finally, Michael Schmidt of the German Association of German-speaking DX clubs (ADDX) outlined his views on the challenges facing DX and SWL Clubs in the present era of decreasing shortwave broadcasts. Also of note was the Archive that ADDX is building up on its website of DX bulletins, QSLs, articles, schedules etc www.addx.de

On Thursday afternoon a small group of us went with Harald Süss of the Austrian DX Club (ADXB-OE) to visit the Dessau Amateur Radio Club station (DR5Y) a half-hour drive away. Their impressive clubhouse is in a former GDR military (NVA) building on the edge of the Dessau airfield (originally site of the Junkers works). They were holding their weekly club meeting and made us very welcome with refreshments and barbecued sausages. To the thump thump of a heavy metal festival being held on the on the adjacent airfield, we huddled in torrential rain under the shelter of an awning made from an upturned satellite dish, before being driving around the perimeter to a small square concrete building topped by a 10m parabolic dish pointing skyward. We were told the dish was originally used very successfully by the GDR military for intercepting western communications, but the club now use it for moonbounce communications (EME) on the 23cm band - although it was currently awaiting repairs.



This excursion to Dessau meant we missed most of the conference presentation by Bernd Reuter of his company’s new RDR50 receiver – see website: www.reuter-elektronik.de (in German but Google translate may help). This was followed by a fascinating talk by Manfred Rippich on his travels to the South Atlantic accompanied by slides of visits to exotic Tristan de Cunha and Ascension Island. On Friday evening we did catch however another receiver presentation by the German Bonito company of their RadioJet 1102S receiver. It looked like an SDR radio, but they say it’s not strictly speaking an SDR, although it is exclusively controlled by computer. It certainly sounded better than many SDRs though - read more at www.bonito.net/radiojet

On Friday morning, some EDXC matters were discussed. As Tibor Szilagyi was stepping down as Secretary-General, a successor (and also a Deputy S-G) had to be found. Kari Kivekas and Jan-Mikael Nurmela of the Finnish DX Association (FDXA) were proposed as Secretary-General and Deputy respectively and (later during the conference) accepted the proposal. Their appointment now needs to be confirmed by a vote of Full Member clubs. It was also discussed why certain countries were not represented at EDXC conferences, and language was mentioned as a possible reason (English is always the language used). The adoption of some translation system was proposed. Venues for future conferences were discussed. Portugal next year (2012) was proposed (organised by a Finn who lives there) and Alexander Beryozki asked if the EDXC would like to revisit St Petersburg, home of his club, maybe in 2014. Looking further ahead, 2017 is the 50th anniversary of the EDXC, and Risto Vahakainu said the FDXA would like to hold this conference again in Finland (conferences in Finland are always well-attended and organised!).

We were pleased to be invited to the Danish DSWCI Annual Dinner on Friday evening – this truly International Club is now 55 years old! And on Saturday evening, the EDXC Banquet was held with traditional after-dinner tombola. Some good prizes, sadly none going the way of the UK contingent! Perhaps, poignantly, there were many Radio Netherlands tulip pens given away also.

The most interesting talks at conferences are those which are illustrated travelogues with a radio flavour. On Saturday afternoon we were treated to one by Anker Petersen (DSWCI) entitled "DXing along the Pan-American Highway from Canada to Argentina", well illustrated with photos along with lists of what stations he logged en route. This journey was made over a number of years, not all in one trip! And on Sunday our friend from PlayDX Italy, Dario Monferini told of us his "Travels to Argentina and Peru" with Roberto Pavanello in 2011. Dario visited some exotic stations some of us only dream of hearing, never mind visiting! And as a collector of radio stickers and pennants as well as DXer, Dario managed to add to his extensive collection on this trip. The photos of his trip can be viewed at <http://www.playdx.com/foto/conosur2011/index.html>

Also on Sunday, Robert Kipp, updated us on the media situation on St Helena. Radio St Helena ceased its special shortwave broadcasts in 2009 and will close its 1548 MW broadcasts in August 2012. A three station FM network will replace it: a) a relay of BBCWS b) A pop, C&W and news channel c) a channel with volunteer presenters. There's another station already on the island - Saint FM - which is also relayed on Ascension, on the Falkland Islands and on Tristan da Cunha, which can be heard online at <http://www.saint.fm/index.htm>. Radio St Helena stickers, cards, balloons and even beer mats were available to buy from Robert after his talk!

The final Sunday evening session was a discussion on "The Future of Shortwave Broadcasting – There is Hope". The discussion was inconclusive, and maybe the title a tad optimistic, but with for example, the recent increase in German private stations appearing, maybe there is hope? Anker Petersen had again compiled some statistics showing the number of active domestic stations on the Tropical Bands which has continued its downward trend:

1973: 1106 active stations; 1985: 819; 1997: 627; 2009: 247; 2011: 233; 2012: 200



(l-r): Dario Monferini (PlayDX), Michael Schmidt (ADDX), Tibor Szilagyi (EDXC), Anker Petersen (DSWCI)

Also amongst the speakers was Manfred Böhm who had previously worked for Radio Berlin International, Funkhaus Europa (and DW?). The following day at breakfast I was able to show him some letters I had received from RBI in 1974, the "Introducing the GDR" book and an RBI DX Bulletin. Of course RBI ran the only official DX Club in the GDR at that time, but none of its own citizens could become members. And now we were able to attend a DX conference, along with former East German citizens, being held in what was the German Democratic Republic.

During the final day, some interviews were made by Nick Baker (aka Klaus Beilke) for broadcast on a special RMRC/EDXC programme on shortwave via Sitkunai, Lithuania (see DX News).

On Monday we said farewell to Hotel Ochsenkopf and headed north to the Königs Wusterhausen transmitter site and radio museum near Berlin – which will be the subject of a separate article! Our thanks to Dr Harald Gabler & Rhein-Main Radio Club, for organising the conference. (AP)