

The Radio St. Helena QSL Project

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The Radio St. Helena Day special shortwave broadcasts were the idea of John Ekwall and Jan Tunér back in 1992, after the success of the very first broadcast in 1990, which was especially for the NorDX Championship. In 1991 and again in 1995, there were no such special transmissions.

Since the transmitter was put out of service after the famous "Final Transmission" in 1999, there have been no more such RSH Day broadcasts (much to the dismay of very many DXers around the world). For information about the 1999 broadcast, pictures of the 1994 activity, and other topics and links, look in the Internet at the www.sthelena.se web-page. The info there is being updated and expanded. This article and more info will appear there soon. There will also appear a list of the seven still unsolved cases regarding the 1999 RSH QSLs. On the web-page "How It All Began", John Ekwall writes about the beginning of these programs.

After listening to the RSH 25th Anniversary broadcast in 1992, the "last transmission" from Radio St. Helena on shortwave in October of 1999 was an absolute "must listen" situation for me. The propagation and the noise level in central Europe were friendly that evening, and I was able to hear enough to write a reception report. But, being a bit lazy, I did not send my reception report until early Summer of 2000.

After waiting over a year, I started looking around in the Internet and paying closer attention to the QSL notes in SWN, but I was not able to find anything about the '99 transmission or the QSL's. In the Autumn of 2001, I decided to somehow contact Tony Leo.

01. Sept.: Email to Tony with copy of my report -- no reply.
22. Sept.: FAX to Tony with my report -- no reply.
28. Oct.2001: Phone call to station; spoke to secretary about email, FAX, report, QSL.
02. Nov.: Email to Tony with my report -- no reply.
13. Nov.: Resent my email of 02. Nov. to Tony -- no reply.
26. Nov.: Email received from RSH, but there was no text. Also, there had been a virus in the email attachment, and my anti-virus software had deleted the attachment.

In the Spring of 2002, I telephoned the radio station and spoke briefly with Tony. He replied that he was working on the QSL's and that it was slow going and a lot of extra work. This was reported by the DSWCI in the May/June 2002 issue of "SWN". On 05. June 2002, I sent my last email to Tony and expressed my hope that Radio St. Helena would start sending the QSL's before Christmas 2002. I also decided not to bother Tony with any more emails or phone calls.

Suddenly, in the Autumn of 2002, while looking at the web page of Radio St. Helena, I found an article from the St. Helena Herald newspaper written by Mr. John Drummond entitled "Tony Leo 'Signs Off' after 29 years in Radio Broadcasting" in which it was reported that Tony Leo had retired on 15. October !! I was amazed!! I had had no idea that Tony was about to retire, and he had not mentioned a word about it, when I had phoned him a few months earlier!! I soon suspected that no one at the station would know anything about QSL cards and the station would throw all that "old paperwork" away. In any event, I suspected that I (and, perhaps, many other DXers) would never see the QSL card for the "final broadcast" in 1999. That bothered me quite a lot, and I decided to do whatever I could to "rescue" the QSL cards. Don Quixote rides again, I thought to myself !!

Over a year later, I learned that Tony Leo had received some 727 reception reports, including 233 as emails, and had started sending QSLs in October of 2001. The problem was, however, that no one really knew how many QSLs had already been written or sent or to whom!! After a few further emails were not answered, I phoned the radio station again. The secretary was very helpful but could not find my report. I then sent my report again by email – no reply. During the next phone call, she told me that my report would be sufficient for a QSL card, but that that she had no idea who would process the QSL's or when and that she had no idea whether any reports had ever been answered. She also had no idea who would be the new station manager or when.

I then decided to try to contact Mr. John Drummond and ask him to ask Tony Leo to tell me just what the status of the QSL cards for 1999 was and what was going to happen now that he (Tony) had retired. 1st try: 05.Nov.2002; 2nd try: 02.Dec.2002. Mr. Drummond never replied to my emails.

On 22. Dec. 2002, I tried for the 3rd time, but this time I sent the email to John's boss, the Editor in Chief of the newspaper.

Finally, on 23. Dec. 2002, I received my very first email from St. Helena. It was a very brief confirmation of receipt of my email from 22. Dec. but with absolutely no other useful information or mention of Mr. Drummond or Tony and signed by Mike Olsson, CEO, St. Helena News Media Services.

Since I was receiving no answers to my emails and there would surely be a new station manager soon, I decided, in the Spring of 2003, to phone the radio station again. On 12. May, I spoke to the new station Manager, Mr. Ralph Peters, for the first time. On 30. May 2003, Ralph sent me a long email and said that he was working on the QSL's but that it was a lot of work and very slow going (that sounded familiar). He hoped to have the situation under control in a few months. Ralph wrote: "It would seem that I have inherited a real problem with the QSL's for our final Worldwide Broadcast in 1999."

In October, 2003, I sent a FAX to Ralph thanking him for the email in May and expressing the hope that the QSL cards would be processed by Christmas of 2003. In November, 2003, Ralph sent me two email attachments and requested my help in sorting out the problems with the reception reports, the QSL cards, and the addresses of DXers. I immediately asked Anker Petersen of DSWCI for help with the so-called "Problem List" of 13 names with only partial or invalid addresses. I also asked Anker to ask for help around the DX-world, to officially notify all DXers that RSH was seriously trying to clarify the QSL's for 1999, and to give all DXers until 31. December 2003 to report back to me, if they had not already received their RSH QSL card for 1999. That REALLY got the ball rolling!!

On 02. May, 2004, I sent Anker an email that RSH had, on 29.

April, at long last, posted the QSL cards for 1999. The cards were taken by the ship RMS St. Helena to Cape Town and then sent on via AirMail. Anker immediately notified the rest of the DXer world, and we all sat back to wait for the first "Thank-you" emails to start coming in.

On 07. July, a second batch of QSLs was mailed out. Ralph's estimate of 730 reception reports has been extended to around 750. We still have about 4 requests for 1999 open, have processed a hand-full of reports from 1998 and one report from 1997, and still have one "special case" open. We have only had to deny verification in four cases. Seven of 13 cases on the Problem List were clarified.

It took 8 months and a bit of luck to track down a DXer on the Isle of Wight. An international search involving Denmark, Germany, St. Helena, and USA finally found a DXer in Massachusetts.

"Thank-You" notes were received from 32 DXers in 13 countries.

Over 300 emails were processed from DXers in 17 countries (including: Russia, India, Chile, Peru, Brazil, Singapore, New Zealand).

We found one DXer in India, and he replied, "But I could not hear their transmission & did not send any reception report", and also "Yes I remember, long back I sent a request for sending some station materials like sticker, pennant etc for my collection. But any souvenir from this station is always welcome." He received a souvenir card and a RSH sticker. Honesty does pay!

It has all been a lot of work, but due to all this international effort, about a further 60 DXers around the world have received their highly sought after and cherished QSL card from Radio St.

Helena. It was worth it all !! My very special thanks for their invaluable help go to Anker Petersen (DSWCI, Denmark), to Richard d'Angelo (NASWA, USA), and to ALL who helped solve the problems. We ALL owe a great deal to Mr. Ralph Peters, the new Station Manager of Radio St. Helena, for his patience, his understanding of and sympathy for DXers, and, especially, for his tireless efforts over the last year to make this RSH QSL Project a success.

Their QSL can be seen on the next page/ed