



El Teide

Tom Read M1EYP is a leading portable operator with over 1,600 Summits on the Air (SOTA) activations behind him. Here, Tom details the planning that went into activating El Teide on Tenerife and reports on the actual expedition.



Jimmy EA8/MOHGY/P and Tom EA8/M1EYP/P at Pico del Teide, the summit cone of El Teide, 3715m ASL.

The Summits on the Air programme, commonly referred to by its acronym SOTA, has grown impressively since its launch in March 2002. Programme

details are available on the website below. From those humble beginnings of an awards programme involving the hills and mountains of England and Wales, SOTA now boasts over 100 associations and is active in every continent. Despite that,

even when the most accessible non-UK associations came on board in years gone by – for instance, Ireland (EI), France (F) and Germany (DL) – I was limited to the home countries.

www.sota.org.uk

The reason for this limitation was a pact made with my son **Jimmy Read MOHGY**. Then a Foundation licence holder with callsign M3EYP, gained at the age of 12, he made me promise not to activate any new SOTA summits without him! I agreed with this on the understanding that it was his long-term goal to gain the Full amateur radio licence. He made me wait while he focused on his GCSEs and A Level courses. With excellent grades secured, he then successfully negotiated both the Intermediate and Full licence examinations at the age of 19.

This now opened up a whole new world of SOTA for us. We had activated every SOTA summit in England and were making good progress through the other UK associations. Meanwhile, many more associations had joined the SOTA programme right around the globe and now, with both of us with Full licences, we were able to go and activate abroad.

Our first experience of 'operating abroad' didn't feel quite like that. This was our activation of Black Mountain EI/IE-021, a 510m hill just south of the Irish border near the city of Newry. In damp and misty weather, we operated our portable stations between bog and heather. It felt very familiar and not very 'abroad' at all!

A genuine opportunity to 'be the DX' came when we booked a family holiday to Tenerife in the Canary Islands. A glance at the *EA8 Association Reference Manual (ARM)* revealed just two summits listed on the island of Tenerife. There are, in fact, several more summits on the island and these have recently been added to the Canary Islands SOTA programme. However, having only two to consider did mean that we could safely negotiate just a couple of pass-outs from the family holiday to go and do our own thing.

The second highest summit was



First view of El Teide from the TF-21 road.



Cable car (Teleférico) poised for first journey up the mountainside.



View from La Rambleta (upper cable car station) over the National Park - well above the cloud layer!

Guajara EA8/TF-002, 2715m above sea level and we set this aside for a full day's walking towards the end of the holiday. The highest point on Tenerife, though, is Pico del Teide, on the crater rim of the active volcano El Teide, SOTA reference EA8/TF-001, 3715m ASL. This simply had to be our first and main objective. We got our first glimpse of Mount Teide in darkening skies just before our aeroplane dropped into the cloud layer on its descent into Tenerife South (Reina Sofia) airport.

Questions and Answers

There were several questions we needed to consider carefully. What radio kit would we take? On what bands and modes would we operate? How would we cope at an altitude with only 50% of the normal oxygen level? Most importantly, could we access the summit at all?

It was this last question that needed my priority attention well before the holiday. A good road, the TF-21, leads through the Teide National Park and past the lower cable car station (Teleférico del Teide link below) at Tienda Casa de los Balcones. The Teleférico then lifts you from 2356m ASL to La Rambleta at 3555m. There are then three hiking trails on this huge mountain but only one – Telesforo Bravo Trail #10 – leads to the actual summit. Furthermore, in order to protect the fragile environment, this trail has a daily quota system and a permit must be secured in advance.

www.telefericoteide.com/en

Securing the permits was straightforward and free of charge. An online booking system is available on the National Park website (link below) and there were spaces available for my preferred date and time. Early booking is advisable though, because most of the two-hour windows throughout our holiday dates were already fully reserved. We printed out the permits and made note of the requirement that they would need to be accompanied by our passports in order to access the trail.

<http://tinyurl.com/pbtvp8x>



SOTAbeams MFD (Multi Function Dipole for 2m) with minipole and longwire antenna behind.



Jimmy EA8/MOHGY/P operating on 2m FM.

An Early Start

Jimmy and I made an early start on the second morning of the holiday, with an agreed 'get up' at 0500 local time. We ensured that we had the crucial items of sun hats, high factor sun cream, sunglasses and plenty of water with us. The climb would not be long at around 45 minutes and the temperature rather cool at that altitude but proper hydration and sun protection were still vital.

It was still dark as we set off in the hire car from Los Cristianos. Dawn began to break as we passed through the mountain village of Vilaflor and a bright sun soon illuminated the National Park as the TF-21 road climbed above 2000m and above the clouds. With the highest public roads in Britain barely reaching 600m ASL, this was an experience in itself. It was a bright and hot sunny morning as we pulled into the free car park by the cable car station. We were very early for the first ride at 10am, so took some photographs and made use of the café facilities for a snack and morning coffee.

Going up in that first cable car of the day meant that we were very early at La Rambleta – a good 45 minutes before our

allotted permit time of 1100 to 1300 local. Nonetheless, the staff member on duty allowed us through the gate onto Telesforo Bravo Trail #10 after verifying our permits and passports.

Reaching the Peak

In contrast to the warm 27°C at sea level, the temperature above 3500m was hovering around freezing point. In fact, the summit path had only reopened the week before after significant snowfall on Teide and compacted snow was still in evidence at the sides of the path. We progressed slowly, following advice received to stop frequently to refill our lungs with the thin icy air and to take drinks of water. With the significantly reduced oxygen levels at over 3.5km above sea level, the body gets tired much more quickly, especially having made use of the cable car. An alternative way to ascend this mountain is entirely on foot, possibly via an overnight stay at the Altavista Refuge, and then the acclimatisation process is much better.

As we progressed upwards, we were increasingly aware of the smell of sulphur and warm gases being emitted from the rocks. Just before 10am, we reached the



Tom's Youkits HB1B 80/40/30/20m CW transceiver on the summit rocks.



Tom EA8/M1EYP/P.

summit – Pico del Teide – and paused for a moment to take more photographs. We had to revel in the spectacular panorama afforded by being atop a volcano, nearly 4km tall, on an island in the Atlantic Ocean. We couldn't hang around too long though because we had our time limit to bear in mind and, of course, we desperately needed at least four QSOs each to collect the SOTA points to qualify for the mountain activation.

Setting Up

Jimmy EA8/MOHGY/P is a keen 2m FM enthusiast. Although he realised that he would probably need to operate on HF to qualify the summit, he was insistent on first setting up his SOTabeams (link below) MFD (Multi-Function Dipole) to see what local action he could drum up on 2m FM. I surveyed the area for a while to try and work out how I could get some wire in the air without getting in the way of other walkers. Access was limited to the path itself so this needed some deliberation. Eventually, I found a way to secure my mini-telescopic pole to the metal railings and suspend the end-fed longwire so that it was out of the way.

www.sotabeams.co.uk

I found a bit of a recess in the boulders that provided some but not complete comfort for operating. I connected my Micro Z antenna tuner and my YouKits HB1B CW transceiver and was almost ready to go. Finally, I programmed the summit reference – EA8/TF-001 – into one of the memories of my Palm Cube and started to call “CQ SOTA” as EA8/M1EYP/P on the Mini Palm Paddle.

What bands to use had been a topic for much debate and discussion between Jimmy and myself in the months leading up to our El Teide expedition. We wanted to take small, simple systems that could be powered from internal batteries and not have the stress of whether or not battery packs would be allowed through airport check-in. Hence, I went for my neat little HB1B transceiver. However, this CW-only rig would not give Jimmy any HF SSB fallback option. Also, it covers the 80,



Jimmy EA8/MOHGY/P and Tom EA8/M1EYP/P on the summit of Guajara EA8/TF-002, with El Teide EA8/TF-001 in the view behind.

40, 30 and 20m bands and there was the possibility that 28MHz might be the best option from the middle of the day from the Canaries. Fortunately, Jimmy's rig is the Yaesu FT-817, which ticks all these requirements.

Pile-Up Time

My worries over absorption were soon banished when a mini-pile-up descended on my 20m CW frequency. It wasn't a huge DXpedition type pile-up by any means, which was not a bad thing with the limited time available. It was, however, sufficient to quickly and easily put 23 QSOs into my logbook. Particularly satisfying were the two summit-to-summit (S2S) contacts with Ignacio EA2BD/P on Etxauri EA2/NV-070 and Barry M0IML/P on Cheriton Hill G/SE-015. All our QSOs were back into Europe.

I checked on how Jimmy was getting on. He had managed to make three QSOs on 2m FM – one with another amateur on Tenerife and two over the sea into Gran Canaria. However, that fourth QSO was not forthcoming. Jimmy uncoupled his FT-817 from the MFD 2m antenna and brought it over

to my position. We hooked it up to the longwire and tuner and found a clear SSB frequency just above 14.300MHz. After a few CQ SOTA calls, Jimmy was answered by fellow SOTA activator **Carolyn G6WRW**. This netted him the ten points available for activating El Teide and we could pack away and descend.

Although only a short distance, and much easier than ascending, it was still necessary to pause for breath periodically at this high altitude. Soon we were dropping quickly on the eight-minute cable car descent and feeling satisfied with a job well done. We rewarded ourselves with a buffet lunch of paella, Canarian potatoes, seafood and salads, accompanied by a *cerveza grande* each, of course.

Guajara

We returned to the National Park four days later on the last full day of our holiday. This time our target was Guajara EA8/TF-002, the only other listed SOTA summit on Tenerife at that time. This was a proper walk of around 8km each way so we allowed ourselves three hours for the ascent. A shorter route is available



Summit area of El Teide.



Snow cleared from the summit path.



Cable car for our descent.

for those who don't mind being close to edges with steep drops. That sort of thing is not for me though and we selected the longer route.

Both routes start from the car park of the café at Parador between the two mountains of El Teide and Guajara. The drive from Los Cristianos was almost identical to that for the El Teide expedition but this time we stopped about one kilometre earlier on the TF-21. Starting before daybreak, our walk began under a magnificent night sky, undisturbed by cloud cover (which we were already above) or light pollution. An hour or so later, the sun began to rise and we turned off our head torches. The temperature soon increased as we hiked along the winding and gradually ascending track – the Sendero 4 route (Sendero 31 is the steeper and more exposed path).

By mid-morning, we had reached the summit, marked by a large and substantial stone shelter. This would be our 'shack' for the activation and we erected our respective antennas accordingly. The north-facing wall of the summit shelter had a 'window' built into it, the tradition being to frame the El Teide mountain within it and take a photograph. I duly obliged before making my initial CQ calls.

A Relaxed Operation

This was to be a more relaxed operation, and we remained on the summit for two hours, regularly topping up with factor 50 sun cream. We were not alone on the lunar landscape for long, with several walking parties passing through, most of them arriving by the steep Sendero 31 path. One group joined us in the shelter and promptly laid out a rather magnificent buffet lunch and wine – very civilised.

Using the HB1B, I made 13 QSOs on 20m CW, including an S2S with **Heinz HB9BCB/P** on Gibelegg HB/BE-158. Meanwhile, Jimmy hadn't managed to raise a single contact on 2m FM so he brought his FT-817 over to work on HF. Ironically, after making seven 20m SSB QSOs and qualifying the summit, he then did get a QSO on VHF.



Dawn approach to Guajara.

After a lunch of tinned squid and mussels, we decided to try out the 10m band. The HB1B doesn't cover 28MHz so once again we connected Jimmy's rig to my HF antenna and tuner. We both then made several 10m SSB QSOs, included S2S with **Barry MOIML/P** on Detling Hill G/SE-013.

The return walk to Parador was pleasant but hard work in the heat of the afternoon Canarian sun. The hire car's air conditioning was most welcome.

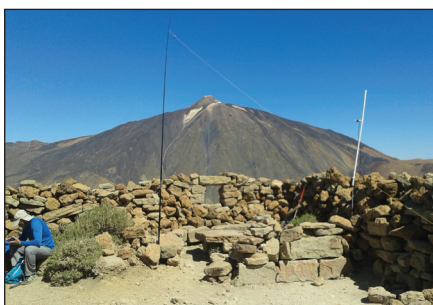
Since our visit to Tenerife, the rest of the island's qualifying summits have been added to the EA8 Association Reference Manual. This takes the number of SOTA summits on Tenerife from 2 to 19 summits. This, of course, means

that our 'completion' of the islands is no more. Personally, I see this as good news because this holiday to Tenerife was probably the most enjoyable we have ever had as a family. The weather, scenery, accommodation, food and entertainment were all fantastic and everyone wants to go back for more. When we do, there will no doubt be more SOTA activations undertaken. Some will be in sharp contrast to these two rugged, tall and majestic mountains because a few of the prospective new summits are on small, green coastal hills.

SOTA is a key consideration for all our holiday planning now, that's for sure.



"Framing" El Teide in the Guajara summit shelter 'window' – a local tradition.



Our antennas on Guajara summit, with El Teide in the background.



Jimmy EA8/MOHGY/P operating on 10m SSB.



Jimmy EA8/MOHGY/P on the Sendero 4 trail to Guajara.



Tom EA8/M1EYP/P ascending Guajara EA8/TF-002.