

Traveling with Ham Radio in Europe

[Jim Stockwell W6KC](#)

1971 – Mobile in Europe

In May 1971, I had worked in IT for a couple of years and was a recent MBA graduate. It seemed like it might be the best time in life, before settling down to a career and long-term commitments, to take an adventurous trip into the world. I decided that the adventure would be to buy a VW camper and travel in Europe. Of course, I wanted to add to the adventure by taking my ham radio gear with me, so that became part of the planning and trip logistics. My former call sign was WA6GDS and I applied for reciprocal licenses from all the countries that I thought I might operate from.



In Monaco, my favorite radio QTH in 1971

Other than picking up my camper at the VW factory in Germany, I had a very open ended itinerary with no return date. As it turned out, I traveled throughout Europe for five months and had a fantastic time including very special ham radio operations in Monaco (3A0FP), Andorra (C31EC) and Lichtenstein (HB0XTL)...back then you could get local call signs, so that added to the fun. My girlfriend, JoAnn (now XYL), travelled with me part of the time during her two months of summer vacation from college. Towards the end of my stay in Europe, I dropped my VW Camper off in Northern Germany to have it shipped to New York City. I spent a few more weeks in Europe and flew to NYC where I picked up the camper and started part two of my adventure. I drove up through New England and then across Canada before finally heading southwest back to Los Angeles. Not by coincidence, I returned home on JoAnn's 20th birthday on October 17, 1971.

2019 – Portable in Europe

Fast forward some 48 years. JoAnn (K6FBI) and I have been married since 1973 and have two adult sons. We both recently retired and, given that we have plenty of time now, we planned an almost three-month long trip to Europe. We focused less on the big cities and more on the smaller towns and unique places. Spending a lot of time in Italy and taking a portable ham radio rig was the general plan.

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Preparing and Packing

I wanted to run 100 watts but keep the radio gear as light and compact as possible. I went with a Yaesu FT-991A transceiver and two antennas: an Alpha FMJ HF Vertical Antenna and a 36-foot end fed wire. Three lengths of coax (17ft, 25ft and 50ft) plus an arborist's throw weight and guy line proved very handy. I also purchased a 3D printed iambic paddle that weighted just 2 ounces. When I propped it under the radio it was pretty stable. I was able to fit the complete rig into one carry-on piece of luggage.



The portable station is ready to go

Our trip began and ended in Paris. The availability of low-cost direct flights from LAX to Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG), as well as an excellent car lease program from Citron made Paris an easy choice. After arriving on March 25, we spent a few fun days in Paris then picked up our Citron C3 and headed towards the south of France. Along the way we visited castles in the Loire Valley and at Carcassonne, wineries in Saint-Émilion and took a canoe trip on the Dordogne River. Next, we spent a couple of days on the French Riviera and then headed for Italy.

Citta' della Pieve

Upon arrival in Italy, we slowed things down a bit. On April 9, we checked into our apartment in Citta' della Pieve (CDP) for a 10-night stay. We also booked another 10-night stay in this same apartment beginning in mid-May. During and in between the two stays we traveled all over Italy.

CDP is a small walled medieval hill town located in central Italy midway between Florence and Rome. It is happily not on the tour-



Both the vertical and end fed were deployed out of the second story window

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ist path and is perfectly located for exploring the sights of Umbria and Tuscany.

I setup my portable station and made my first QSOs in Europe from our apartment in CDP. We did not have a balcony, so I needed to prop up my vertical from the second story window ledge of our building. I also, used my arborist throw weight to toss my end fed wire antenna out the same window to the roof of the garage below. The antennas had a clear shot to the northwest, and both performed reasonably well.

On April 10, I operated as I0/W6KC, in the 1300 and 1900 CWTs and was excited to make a total of 20 QSOs including 12 QSOs with North America (NA). And on April 17, I operated again in the 1300 and 1900 CWTs making a total of 17 QSOs (11 NA). From CDP we headed for Sorrento where I made 13 casual QSOs as I8/W6KC. In between hamming, we visited the Amalfi Coast and the ancient Roman city of Pompeii.

Magic in Matera

From Sorrento, we moved on to the ancient city of Matera. The area of what is now Matera is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It has been settled since the Paleolithic (10th millennium BC) which makes it potentially one of the oldest continually inhabited settlements in the world.

When we checked into our accommodations in Matera, our host showed us our unit and then he took us up to the roof terrace where we had an amazing view of the old city. He said that we could have access to that



Matera is both an amazing city and radio QTH

area as well. My eyes widened and I asked him if I could put up my shortwave antenna and he said OK. The 1900 CWT was at 9pm local time, so I started setting up about 7:30pm while there was still enough daylight to see. I put up my vertical antenna, hooked the rig up and made a couple of QSOs on 20m to check it out. In the CWT I ended up making 15 QSOs with 11 in EU and 4 in the US. I called CQ and even had a mini-pileup making four EU QSOs in two minutes. My best EU CWT results so far.

The Trulli

Leaving Matera, we headed east across the “boot” part of Italy and visited the towns of Alberobel-

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lo and Castellana Grotte. This area of Italy is known for the trulli, a mid-14th century building technique that is still in use in this region. It features pyramidal domed roofs that are built up of corbelled limestone slabs.

Castellana Grotte

In Castellana Grotte we stayed in building in a rural area with a trulli roof. There was room to setup my vertical on a flat section of the roof. I also ran the end fed wire from the roof to a nearby olive tree. The end fed seemed to work better vs. the vertical. Operating as I7/W6KC, I made 23 QSOs including four QSOs in the Florida QSO Party.

San Marino

After a couple more stops driving north along the Adriatic Sea on the east coast of Italy, we arrived in the Republic of San Marino. I had booked a two night stay in a hotel with a balcony, thinking that it would be an opportunity to operate from T7. However, I later found out that San Marino does not participate in the European Conference of Postal & Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT) agreement and does not issue reciprocal licenses. It actually worked out fine,



Trulli houses in Alberobello



Vertical on the roof in Castellana Grotte; End fed antenna from the roof to an olive tree in Castellana Grotte

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San Marino was beautiful and we thoroughly enjoyed visiting this unique little country.

Verona

In Verona, we were on the fourth floor of our building and we had a great view from the balcony looking towards the old part of the city. In the early evening, the sun would light up the tops of some of the buildings casting a golden glow on them above the city. Operating briefly as I3/W6KC, with my vertical clamped to the balcony railing, I made seven CW QSOs.

Bellagio

When we checked into our apartment in Bellagio, all we could say was "wow." We had such a wonderful view of Lake Como and were just steps away from the cute little town and the ferry docks below. I put up my end fed antenna from the kitchen window of our second-floor unit down to a tree in the backyard. I was able to operate as I2/W6KC in the 1300 and 1900 CWTs on May 8 and made a respectable total of 37 QSOs.



No QSOs possible, but for JoAnn and me San Marino was beautiful



A golden glow over Verona



Bellagio was beautiful, with good radio conditions too

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Levanto

From Bellagio, we drove to Levanto on Italy's beautiful northwest coast. We stayed in Levanto for the next five nights while we explored the nearby five old seaside villages that make up the area called the Cinque Terre. Even though our apartment was on the ground floor, I had access to the roof of our three-story building. I installed my end fed antenna across part of the roof and down to a tree in the yard below. Using my I1W6KC call, I made nine casual QSOs plus 33 QSOs in the CQ-M International DX Contest (CQM).

Lucca

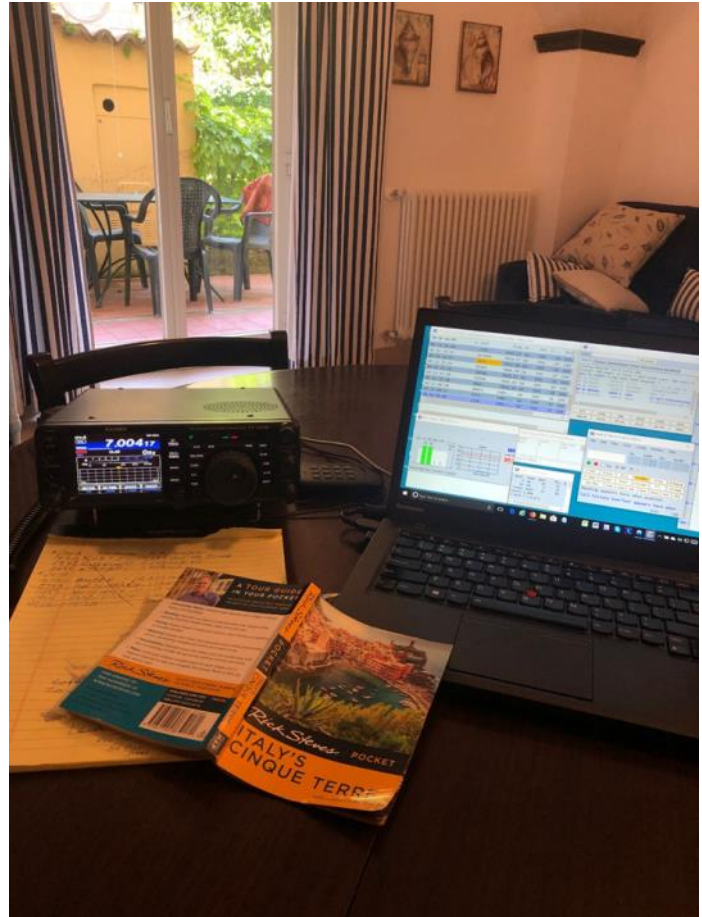
We stayed just one night in Lucca on our way back to our "base camp" in Citta' della Pieve. I was able to put up my end fed from our balcony to a tree in the backyard and make 10 quick QSOs in eight different EU countries.

Back in Citta' della Pieve

It was good to be back in CDP for another 10-day stay. In addition to taking some amazing day trips to Assisi, Siena and wine tasting in Tuscany, I made a total of 56 QSOs in the 1300 and 1900 CWT sessions on both May 15 and May 22. Also, I participated in the King of Spain and WPX CW contests and added another 80 QSOs to the I0/W6KC log.

The Home Stretch

After the end of our time in CDP we linked up with our two sons in Rome. The four of us spent the next two weeks making our way back to Paris. We travelled north through Italy making stops in Padua and Venice before arriving in Salzburg, Austria. Continuing on,



Levanto was a great place for the radio and exploring the Cinque Terre too



In Lucca, a good view from the business end of the end fed antenna

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we made a quick one-night stop in Imst, Austria, where I operated as OE/W6KC in the 1900 CWT and made eight QSOs, including one with Bert F6HKA. The next day we drove to Liechtenstein for another one-day stay where I made 21 HB0/W6KC QSOs including another one with F6HKA. From there it was on to Switzerland, Germany and finally Paris and the flight back home.

The Experience

This was a wonderful trip!

It's hard to compare it with five months of camping and hamming in Europe in 1971 during my youth, but still pretty adventurous for this point in life. We drove 8,600 km (5,300 miles), stayed in 30 cities and seven countries. We visited many amazing places including a dozen UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

I setup my rig in 14 cities and four countries and was able to make 384 CW and 37 SSB contacts for a total of 421 QSOs. One of the highlights was operating in 13 CWT sessions. It was fun getting familiar with many of the EU CWops call signs and making a total of 155 CWT QSOs including 37 "DX QSOs" with NA CWops. We are already planning the next adventure.

I have uploaded a variety of photos and a few videos from our travels to these two albums: [1971 Mobile in Europe](#) and [2019 W6KC Portable in Europe](#).



Operating in Liechtenstein with a great view of the Alps

