

Finding the “Holy Grail” in Russia



Joseba Felix Tobar-Arbulu, Professor at the University of the Basque Country

When Araba, a Eurasian woodcock, set off on his 3280 km journey from the Basque Country to Karelia, Russia in March 2008, he carried a 9.5 g Solar PTT from Microwave Telemetry, Inc. Little did we know then that this would lead to our own adventure eighteen months later to search for our “Holy Grail”, Araba’s PTT.

Sadly, Araba’s PTT started transmitting intermittently around August 2008, with no transmissions at all during the winter. From the data, it appeared that Araba was dead or the PTT had been shed. Looking at detailed maps in the area of Karelia, we knew that the PTT was close to Rantala, north west of Suojarvi. Lo and behold, the PTT started intermittent transmissions again in May 2009.

We decided to undertake a trip to Russia to find Araba’s PTT but first, Ibon and Ruben, members of our Basque team, experimented with locating another PTT we had with a scanner and Yagi antenna. After placing the PTT in different places, they tried to locate it with the small antenna of the scanner, without any antenna at all, with different frequencies (above and below the PTT’s frequency), silencing the scanner in different

bridge over a river was down! We were still 10 kilometers away. We took another forest road but 3 km on, the road turned into small roads. We set off on foot for the remaining 7 km; most importantly we would also have to walk the same distance back. Anyway, we trudged on in the pouring rain. Finally, we stopped for food, cheese, tea and the much needed cognac that Alexandr and Ilya had brought.

We only had one chance to find the PTT since we were leaving for Saint Petersburg the next morning after the transmission. As we sipped cognac to warm up, we calculated the possible beginning of the PTT’s transmission. During this 16 hour window, we would need special clothes, sleeping bags, food, tea, and of course vodka. Many thanks to Valery Shpilevoi, the owner of the small hotel in which we stayed in Suojarvi, who provided it all and took on this project as his own.

Using the scanner and the Yagi antenna, Ibon, David and I narrowed our search to 2 x 3 meter square where we thought the PTT was. By then, it was raining, snowing and very cold. Valery prepared the fire, coffee and vodka.



The “Holy Grail”, as found in all its beauty.

Photo by Alexandr Artemjev



Eureka!

Photo by Ilya Artemjev



Ilya holding the PTT.

Photo by Ibon Teletxea



Valery starting the fire while it is snowing and freezing cold.

Photo by David Rubio



Valery our wonderful cook with Ilya and Alexandr.

Photo by David Rubio



Taking a break in the rain.

Photo by Ilya Artemjev



Basque team having drinks after dinner.

Photo by Alexandr Artemjev

positions and so on. Using the triangulation method described in a past issue of MTI’s newsletter, they figured out how to locate the PTT. We were now ready to set off for Russia.

With the help of Dr. Nikita Chernetsov, with whom I had corresponded, we contacted Dr. Misha Markovets and a friend of his born in Suojarvi: Sergey Ponomarev. They provided us with detailed maps of the area. The Russian team they proposed included Alexandr Artemjev and his son Ilya. We set off for Rantala in Suojarvi in two cars, with the GPS and the scanner.

We soon had a problem: the forest road taking us to our search location (as determined from the most recent high quality Argos locations) was closed, as a

Under poor lighting, we searched for the PTT to no avail. As we were about to give up, Ilya and Alexandr shouted to us the news: “Here it is!” Our “Holy Grail” at the base of a fir tree! Amidst shouts of joy and laughter, we headed back.

It has been a real pleasure to get to know so many people: Nikita Chernetsov, Misha Markovets and Sergey Ponomarev through emails and the Internet, Alexandr, Ilya and Valery in person. Thank you for your valuable help. We thank the Araba team of Asier and Rubén San Vicente, Josu Salazar, Victor Regueiro, Javier Uriarte and Ikatx Pérez de Arriba. Last but not least, we would like to thank the Club de Cazadores de Becada, Fedenca, Irec and Txepetxa for sponsoring us and Microwave Telemetry, Inc. for donating the PTT and their support.