

KIOKB/P PRESENTS
A SOUTHWESTERN AMERICAN ROVE
TO
BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK
DL88JX
SEPTEMBER 2023

THE FIRST AND PERHAPS LAST ACTIVATION
OF IO-117 FROM DL88JX



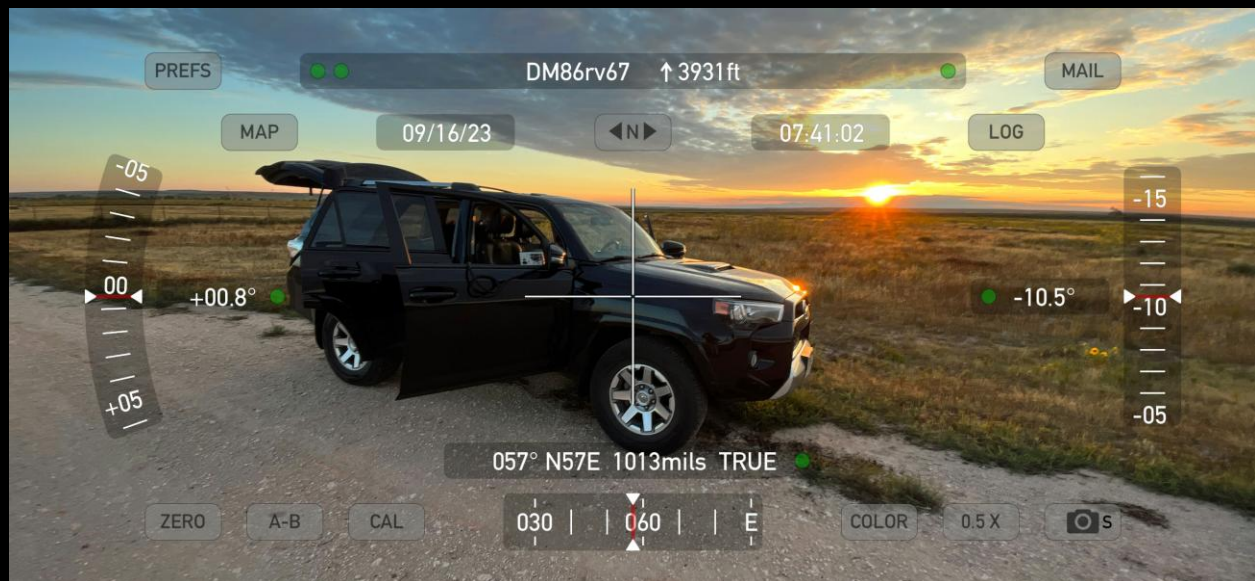
Having been on GC since April 2023 and having run my first roves ever to Wyoming and South Dakota I was hooked on roving and IO-117. The worldwide coverage available on IO-117 was something completely new to hams in the center of the U.S.A. Not since the early Oscar satellite days had this opportunity presented itself to the ham community. Being only four years young into satellite hamming I had missed those early satellite days completely.

I decided I had to take my setup on the road but it needed improvements to make it more efficient than what I started with. I bought a car seat desk and brought the equipment inside while utilizing the car battery and inverter instead of a desk, equipment and generator outside the vehicle, which is what I had been doing. I was still tripod mounting the antenna and rotor at that time.

So, I had a trip to visit family in Texas planned for September of 2023 and I decided to add ham radio to the menu this go around. Since Oklahoma was not represented on GC at that time I planned for an overnight stay in the panhandle of Oklahoma to activate DM86 on the way down to Texas.



I setup in the dark off the main road near a cemetery and hammed the night away until sunrise.



That was the only activation on the way to Texas but I had my sights on DL88 in Big Bend National Park. I had no idea if I would be able to get it done but I was going to give it the good old college try. I had discussions with N6UA before I left about DL88. Doug had activated DL88 in the past and his guidance and moral support was an invaluable. He also supplied the K5Z special event cards for the special activation. Applying for the special call was a simple process and within a week or so I had the call secured for the operation before departure. This also was my first POTA activation for any hams that were interested.

After spending time in Texas it was time to head further west and attack BBNP. The only kicker at this point was that GC had been put in a 2400 baud rate and ICOM transceivers appeared unable to successfully transmit at the new rate. It sounded like it would be placed back in the 1200 baud rate the day before my first planned activation of DL88. That sounded good to me.

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

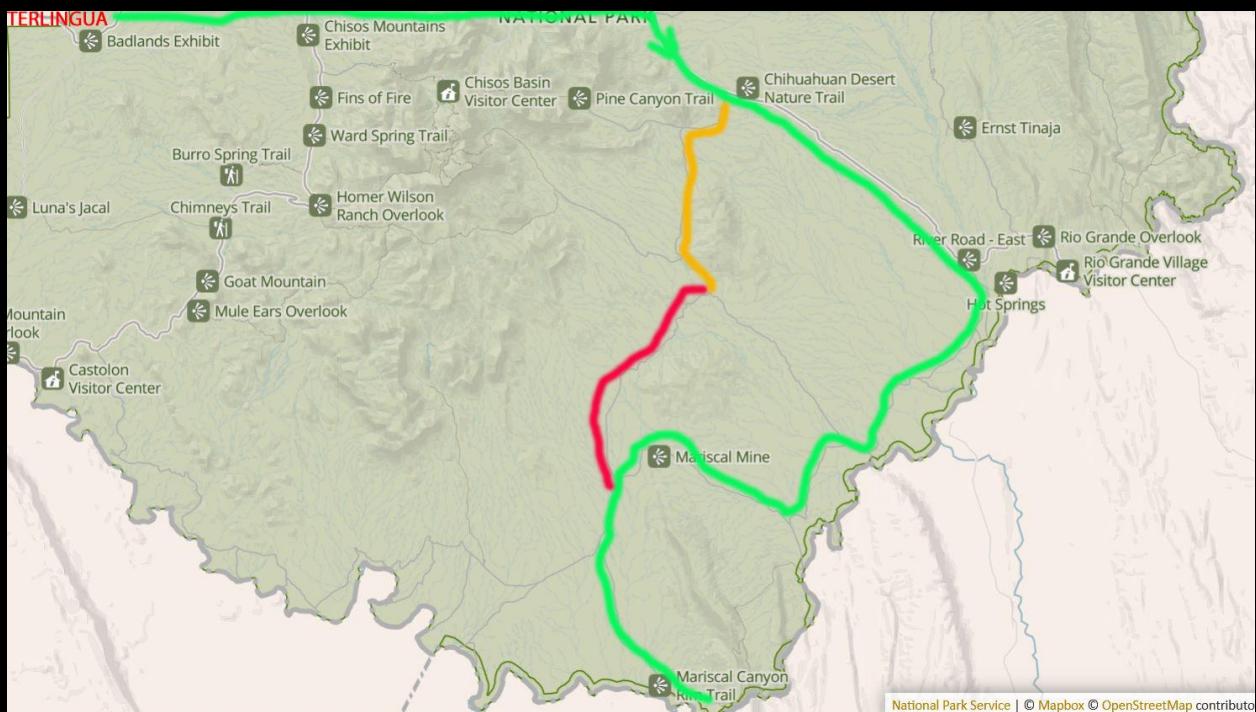
WEST ENTRANCE

SEPTEMBER 24, 2023



Even if GC wasn't back at 1200 baud I was going in to check it out from a geographic stand point to see what DL88 was all about in person.

I was staying in Terlingua which is outside the west end of the park. In order to get to DL88 you have to cross the park headed east and take a 4WD road off the park highway further into the park to navigate your way down to the Tally 2 campsite area in DL88.



I departed about 3AM and took the park highway to the **Glenn Springs Road** cut off noted in orange above. That route looked the most direct and it is but not without issues. From the Glenn Springs Road I turned onto the **Black Gap Road** which I marked in red for a reason. It takes you through a mountainous region as you descend into the valley below. It ended up being one of the most severe 4WD roads I have ever been on. Initially there is a very steep drop to start the road. You then have to negotiate a wet bog with thick vegetation in the dark that I

actually walked with a stick to gauge the deepness of it before plowing through it. One hill climb obstacle looked unsurpassable but after piling up boulders in line with my wheel base I was able to get up and over it. That required a bit of work. The next obstacle was a washed out corner along a cliff where the best you could do in a very slow and deliberate turn was to have three wheels on the ground with the left rear hanging over the cliff. I would have turned back but having come that far I really didn't want to renegotiate in reverse what I had come through already.

The first half of the **Black Gap Road** was like that in every turn but as you dropped in elevation things improved dramatically and the last half of that road was a breeze. **All I can say is DON'T DO IT! TAKE THE GREEN ROUTE TO AND FROM DL88**, it's much faster.

The one thing that did come out of taking the Black Gap Road was the beautiful sunrise I got to witness after having passed the worst parts of that drive.



After the 4 hour 4WD slog that morning I finally arrived at the Tally 2 Campsite and DL88jx.



I had arrived on 25 September, 2023 and got set up for the upcoming GC pass. Needless to say it was quite a disappointment to find that GC was still in the 2400 baud rate. I could decode a few stations using Yaesu rigs but I was unable to successfully transmit with my IC-9700.



I decided after that pass to head out of the park in daylight. The next pass also ended up being at 2400 baud so it was a lucky decision to leave. I got to see what the green route looked like on the way back in daylight for another attempt the following day on the 26th.

Taking the easy 4WD route made the trip one way 3 hours in length. That would entail 6 hours of driving each day for the next two days to attempt the DL88 activations. Since I couldn't stay after dark I had to start each morning about 3AM to get there in time to set up for the first available GC pass and any more before sunset.

What follows are scenes along the 4WD road to DL88.



Sunrise in DL89



Driving in during darkness allowed for witnessing some fine sunrises over the desert.







Noooooooo! Don't Go That Way!



Chisos Mountains





Chisos Mountains





Looking back north this is the junction to Tally Road which is to the right with the car door open.



I called these the Guardians of Tally Road



Tally Road to the left and looking South toward the Rio Grande River at sunrise.



Just past this Guardian is a dip down into a mud bog that I almost got stuck in coming out in the afternoon. This is about a mile from the Tally 2 site.



From Tally 2 the Mariscal Mountains are in the path of Europe and take off about 5 degrees of elevation on a pass in that direction.

SEPTEMBER 26, 2023

When I got up I checked and found that GC was back on 1200 baud so I made the 3 hour drive on the 26th to DL88 and got ready for only one available pass that day.

Due to the passes that day that had a FP in DL88 I only had one pass to operate in the morning since I had to be on my way back by dark. That pass did include some Asia but mostly NA. There were 54 non-dupe contacts logged. The highlight of that pass was a contact with VE1CWJ who completed his 488 Grid Master list with DL88. I was happy to be part of his achievement.

14:01:25	VE1CWJ	K5Z	FN85
14:01:26	W0BZ	JJ3JHP	DM79 Colorado QSL?
14:01:27	GreenCube	ALL	[TLM: eps/obc/radio boo
14:01:29	K5Z	VE1CWJ XE2YWH	RR73
14:01:32	K5Z	VE1CWJ XE2YWH	RR73
14:01:35	K5Z	VE1CWJ XE2YWH	RR73
14:01:48	VE1CWJ	K5Z	R73 TU 488 JEFF! :o)

This was taken just shortly before that pass started.

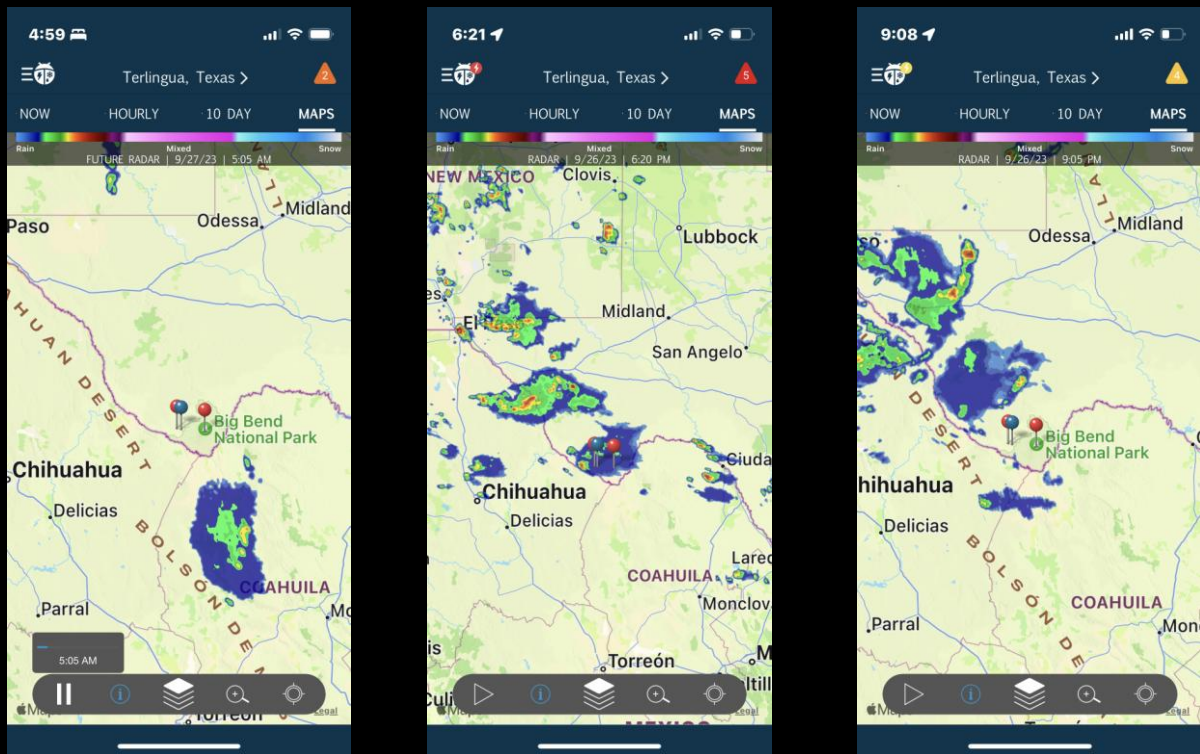




The following morning would allow for two passes with the later one finishing at sunset getting into a bit of Europe.

THE EVENING OF THE 26TH

Up to this point the weather had been perfect but there were storms developing in the park this night.



They passed right over DL88 and that entire area I had to drive through the next morning. The road in areas is very sandy and you pass through areas with deep ruts from previous tracks going through mud at the time. Whether I could get there or not due to mud remained to be seen but I was going to find out.

The weather came over Terlingua that evening and put on a good light show at one point but no rain.



SEPTEMBER 27TH, 2023

I got started at 2AM this morning in case I ran into any road issues I needed to find my way around. It ends up the drive was uneventful other than the rabbits, other varmints and horses crossing the road in the dark. If it had rained the night before you couldn't tell it now.



After the first pass while taking a nap and waking up in a sweat I noticed the temperature was at 108°F, a toasty fall day.





I had to keep the extra gasoline out of the sun as much as possible.

Before the second pass I saw the clouds building up over the Meriscal Mountains. I didn't particularly want to get stuck in DL88 if I could help it so I packed everything up and drove an hour back up to the Mariscal Valley and Mine in DL89 to see for myself if it was bad. Those clouds were actually on a mountain range behind what I could see from DL88. Feeling good about the weather I drove back to DL88 and set up for the afternoon pass.



I managed a handful of EU stations at the end of the second pass as the sun was setting. I packed up and headed the three hour drive back to Terlingua.

So three day trips to DL88, two activation days in DL88 and three IO-117 passes activated in DL88jx. After dupes were removed (this was before UHM made rove logging easier and more accurate) I had logged 98 unique callsigns. Although in DL88 there is no cell signal so you are on your own anyway.

The following day I set up for a DL89 activation just inside the park but it was telemetry only pass to my despair. I packed up and headed north activating what I could in New Mexico on the drive home. Fortunately GC came back up so I could put New Mexico on GC since at that time it was much needed by many DX stations as it was under represented on GC, not to mention new grids.

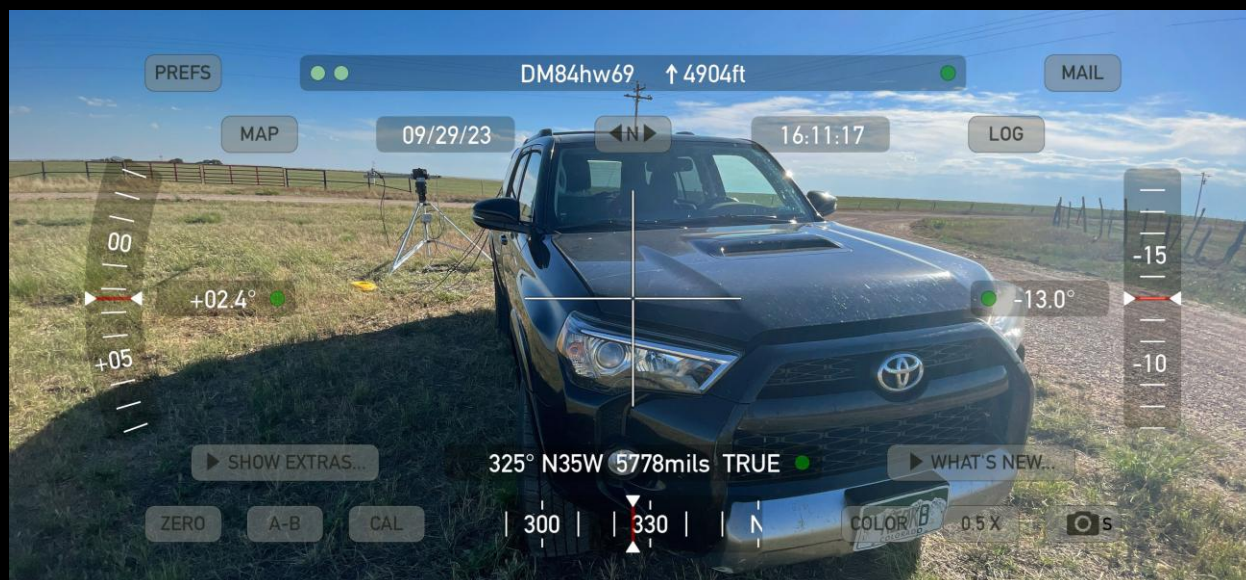


The GC pass that wasn't...

DM82 NM



DM84 NM



A Night in DM85 NM



A full moon in DM85 NM



A night with the moon and tarantulas...

Next a mad dash to DM87 CO



DM87 wasn't on the planned list but it was on the way home and requested so an effort was made to get there in time for one pass in the morning before the final drive home to Northern Colorado.

THE END

