



Northern California DX Foundation

www.ncdxf.org

Spring/Summer 2009

So rare, so close... yet, so far away The K5D story

Tim Pearson, K5AC

THE TITLE SUMS IT UP. DESECHEO Island is only 14 miles off the west coast of Puerto Rico and yet, for the past 15 years, hungry DXers felt it might as well have been a million miles away.

History

Desecheo was created as a National Wildlife Refuge in 1976 and is administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In March 1979, Desecheo was recognized by the ARRL's DXCC program as a new entity under the separate administration criteria, after the first operation by KP4AM/D. During the 1980s and early 1990s there were 10 operations from Desecheo which kept the demand for KP5 fairly low, but in the mid-90s things changed and special use permits were no longer issued. Desecheo slowly crept up the most wanted list.

The frustrations between the Amateur Radio community and USFWS mounted. There were repeated denials for special use permits; there were appeals, lawsuits and a bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. There was a rogue radio operation, which was accepted for DXCC credit, but was conducted without the permission of the USFWS. All of these actions increased the tensions between Hams and USFWS, but eventually led to a compromise.

Now Desecheo is squarely in the Top Ten Most Wanted DXCC List along with the likes of North Korea and Yemen.

Finally, a breakthrough came in January 2008 and culminated mid-summer when the USFWS sent out a RFP (request for proposal) to every radio group and individual that had requested a special

use permit to operate from Desecheo in the previous five to 10 years. Their offer was for a 14-day operation with

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Tim Pearson, K5AC, in Rincon, Puerto Rico with Desecheo Island in the palm of his hand. Photo: N4NX



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From the President's desk

YOU MAY NOTICE FROM OUR MASTHEAD AT THE LEFT, there have been some changes in the NCDXF officers and board members.

After more than 10 years of service, Len Geraldi, K6ANP, has resigned his position as President and become a director. Al Burnham, K6RIM, has resigned his Vice President position after a similar period of time and is also a director. These changes took place at our 17 April 09 board meeting at Visalia.

The Board thanks Len and Al for their many years of service as officers and we are pleased they will continue as directors.

I am your new President and your new Vice President is Glenn Johnson, WØGJ. Tom McShane will add the Treasurer duties to his position of Secretary.

The last 18 months have been a very difficult time for economies around the world but our contributors have continued to fund our Foundation giving us the ability to fund over \$31,000 to 11 DXpeditions from April 2008 through April 2009.

For the first time, this newsletter is going out electronically to approximately 85% of our current contributors who chose to receive it in an email format. We appreciate those who opted for a full-color electronic version and hope the rest of you eventually will do the same. It saves in printing and postage costs, while at the same time gives you a better newsletter.

In October 2009, I will be going on my first DXpedition since 4O3T: K4M on Midway Atoll. NCDXF has provided major funding for this expedition which is No. 13 in Europe and No. 24 worldwide. To say the least, I am learning a lot about the organization of a major DXpedition.

Thank you for your continued support of NCDXF.

— Bruce Butler, W6OSP



NCDXF introduces its newest board member

AT OUR NOVEMBER '08 BOARD meeting, NCDXF voted and accepted Glenn Johnson, MD, WØGJ, as its newest director and in April 2009, Glenn was elected to the Vice President's position, a position vacated by Al Burnham, K6RIM.

Glenn hardly needs much of an introduction to the DX community. He is a 58-year-old orthopedic surgeon living in Bemidji, MN. Glenn was first licensed at age 15 and his awards include DXCC Top of the Honor Role with 352 entities confirmed. Glenn is also an active contester and was a referee at both WRTC 2002 and 2006. He has three consecutive first place awards US 40M single band CQWW RTTY.

Some of Glenn's more notable DXpedition activities have been VKØIR, Heard Island in 1997; A52A, Bhutan in 2000 as expedition leader; VU4 and VU7, along with being the co-leader of the 2009 K5D expedition to Desecheo.

His awards and honors are many but include WØDXCC Mr. DX of the Year, CQ Hall of Fame, W9DXCC Special Humanitarian Award, and VKØIR and VU7RG DXpedition of the Year.

All of Glenn's family, with the
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Glenn Johnson, WØGJ, and Bob Allphin, K4UEE, sign the special use permit for Desecheo. Photo: WØNB.

a maximum of 15 operators sometime in the fall of 2008.

USFWS would evaluate each proposal on a point system based on a stringent list of nine items and a 3-person panel would review the proposals. Seven were submitted by the 15 August 2008 deadline and on 1 October the winning proposal was finally announced: the KP1-5 Project team. (This group of people had been involved since 2002 trying to activate both Desecheo and Navassa.) A few weeks later the decision was made that the operation would take place sometime between January-March 2009, instead of the fall of 2008.

Planning begins

Bob Allphin, K4UEE, and Glenn Johnson, WØGJ, had been involved with the KP1-5 Project since inception and were the obvious choices to co-lead the DXpedition. Mike Thomas, NA5U, was the KP1-5 Project leader. Some of the original team members were not able to commit to the full 21-23 days required for the entire DXpedition — including days before and after for provisioning and equipment storage — so a plan was devised to rotate operators

halfway through the trip; allowing more people to be part of this historic event. It also served to bring in fresh operators at the mid-point.

The team was divided into three groups:

Group 1 members would stay the entire 14 days on the island and consisted of Bob, K4UEE; Gordon Hardman, WØRUN; Garry Ritchie, W8OI; Gary Stouder, K9SG; Jim Livengood, WØNB; George Nicholson, N4GRN; Steve Wright, VE7CT, and Mike Thomas, NA5U.

Group 2 members would operate the first seven days and consisted

of Glenn, WØGJ; Jerry Rosalius, WB9Z; Mike Mraz, N6MZ; Ralph Fedor, KØIR; Dick Hanson, K5AND; Gregg Marco, W6IZT, and John Crovelli, W2GD.

Group 3 members would operate the last seven days and consisted of Neil King, VA7DX; Bill Barr, N4NX; Felipe Hernandez, NP4Z; Eladio Acevedo-Velez, WP3MW; Glenn Kesselring, KØJGH; Grant Kesselring, K1KD, and myself, K5AC.

Over the next four months a flurry of activities occurred, including — but not limited to — securing a URL (www.kp5.us) and setting up a website; recruiting and evaluating team members; designing, building, testing and shipping antennas; designing station layout and devising a power plan; planning infrastructure and provisioning food and drink to feed 25 people for 14 days. (We were responsible for feeding our team plus five USFWS personnel and a group of five research personnel.)

A reconnaissance trip to Desecheo was conducted with USFWS in December '08 and antenna sites were selected and approved by USFWS.

Planning a two-week “campout” might sound pretty simple but the logistics involved in sheltering 15 people, feeding 25 mouths, keeping up to eight stations operational 24-7 and keeping everyone healthy and safe were not much different from the challenges Peter I (3YØX) faced. The only differences were the travel



Camp Desecheo taken from EU Ridge. Photo: NA5U.



Desecheo surf conditions on 19 February. Photo: KØIR.

distance involved, the expense and the weather.

After the reconnaissance trip and getting a closer look at the risky landing spot and the difficult terrain between the landing spot and the campsite, we decided to use helicopters instead of the less expensive, but potentially dangerous, fishing boat option. Because we had a fixed time frame, there was not time to waste waiting for the “ideal” sea conditions. Time wasted is lost, and lost time is QSOs!

Putting the plan into action

The First Team (Groups 1 & 2) arrived in Puerto Rico on 7 February and the first order of business was to undergo UXO (unexploded ordnance) training.

Many items such as antennas, amplifiers, radios, filters, coax, medical supplies, etc., were shipped to Rincon in January and held in storage and on 11 February, all of these items were moved to the forward staging area. Last minute shopping included trips to Home Depot, Costco and the grocery store. Drinking water and gasoline for the generators was delivered and the checklists were completed.

Operations begin

Hiring helicopters turned out to be the right decision. The seas were high and we would likely have been delayed and certainly exhausted if we had used the boat option.

The first helicopter flight with five

team members departed for Desecheo at 12:40Z on 12 February. All during the day, seven tons of equipment was ferried to the island, antennas were assembled, coax was run, generators were set up and power cables were put in place. High winds and thunderstorms on Puerto Rico delayed several of the flights, but we flew until sunset. After sunset the shelters could be erected, as the helicopter prop wash would have blown them down. After sunset, the team had a quick meal and started building the camp under the glare of floodlights. Everyone slept well the first night; we were exhausted.

At first light, everyone was up again and completed setting up the

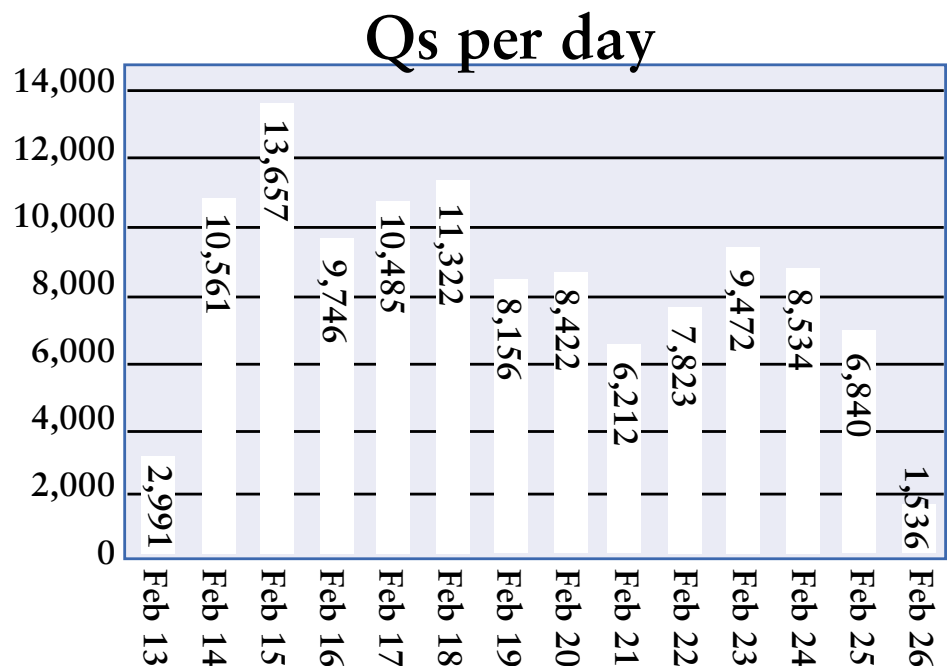
operations tent, a few stations and enough antennas to get on the air. On 13 February at 16:00Z operations began! We put our best operators on in order to make a good first impression. John, W2GD, opened up 20M CW and Jerry, WB9Z, on 17M SSB. After a brief celebration, which included the USFWS security personnel assigned to keep us safe, antenna work and station setup continued — 24 hours later we had 10,000 Qs in the log as we ramped up radio operations.

The pileups were tremendous! Bob, K4UEE, a veteran of eight Top Ten DXpeditions, said they were some of the biggest he had ever heard! Because Desecheo was ranked No. 2 in Asia and No. 3 in Europe, the team was very diligent about exploiting the openings to Europe and the Asia on every band. As the days passed, the QSO count climbed rapidly.

Team rotation

The Group 2/3 rotation was scheduled for 19 February and was to utilize a 32-foot fishing boat hired for that purpose. To our dismay, a large low-pressure system to the northwest of Desecheo began to form and 18 foot seas were predicted for the next 48 hours.

The morning of 19 Feb., Bob, K4UEE; George, N4GRN, and the





Teams 1 & 2, 19 Feb 09, just before shift change when Team 2 left and Team 3 arrived. Left to right: Jim, WØNB; Gary, K9SG; Glenn, WØGJ; Bob, K4UEE; Dick, K5AND; Pete the Penguin; Mike, NA5U (front); Gordon, WØRUN (rear); Ralph, KØIR; Jerry, WB9Z; John, W2GD; Gregg, W6IZT; George, N4GRN; Mike, N6MZ; Garry, W8OI, and Steve, VE7CT.

head of the USFWS Security team checked the boat landing site at 5 a.m. and again at 11 a.m. and waves were six to eight feet high, smashing into the cove and crashing onto the small beach. A boat landing was not only impossible, it was potentially deadly!

Bob checked the budget and was able to allocate \$2,000 toward the cost of hiring another helicopter. The 14 members of the two teams that were to rotate on and off the island agreed to share the additional helicopter cost. Arrangements were made and four hours later Team 2 was at a bar in Rincon; Team 3 was either going through orientation or already on the air.

The first resupply boat since the storm arrived on 21 Feb. with fresh water and fuel; we ran the amplifiers again!

On 24 Feb. K5D surpassed the 100,000 Qs count, exceeding our goal of 80,000!

The camp teardown began on 25 Feb. and eight helicopter flights began the process of moving everything and everyone back to Puerto Rico. Three stations stayed on the air the last night and more QSOs were crammed into our log on the low bands. At


sunrise on 26 Feb. we finished breaking camp and radio operations were stopped at 0939Z on 40M SSB with the Pacifico Radio Club, K6BAG, as our last contact.

Summary

The K5D Team was a very diverse group of people representing the USA, Puerto Rico and Canada. Every team member worked hard to make this DXpedition a success and

our final numbers and the comments from the Amateur community and from the USFWS were quite positive. The QSO total was an impressive 115,787! We were delighted!


K5D now ranks No. 7 among DXpeditions based on QSOs and No. 1 for the most QSOs on 30M. With more than 40% of the total QSOs coming from Europe and Asia, the team felt they had done their best to accommodate those regions where demand for a QSO was highest. We had a total of 32,807 unique QSOs in the log. This measure is probably more indicative of our success in giving a Desecheo QSO to those who need it the most.

NCDXF was there for the first KP4AM/D Desecheo operation in 1979 and was an important sponsor of this Desecheo operation — 30 years later. Without NCDXF's support, operations of this kind would not be possible. 

Glenn Johnson...

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exception of his youngest, are Extra Class.

The NCDXF board is very pleased to have Glenn join us and is sure that his insights into our hobby, his interest in DX and his high degree of personal commitment and integrity will add strength and breadth to our organization. 

Heavy Hitters 2008

We sincerely thank these supporters of the **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA DX FOUNDATION** for their generous contributions during the 2008 calendar year.

\$10,000 or more — W6EEN

\$2,000 to \$3,000 — Northern Illinois DX Association, Rochester Amateur Radio Expo

\$1,000 to \$1,999 — Northern California DX Club, Central Arizona DX Association (K7UGA), K6RIM, W6EUF, K2PLF, Southern California DX Club, Southeastern DX and Contesting Organization, K6IPV, W6SZN

\$500 to \$999 — NN6EE, N4JJ, San Diego DX Club, W6JZH, W6OSP, Anonymous

\$250 to \$499 — W8QID, AA6IR, W1PNR, W6BGK, Twin City DX Association, Mississippi Valley DX/Contest Club, Redwood Empire DX Association, Lone Star DX Association, Mother Lode DX/Contest Club, DM2XO, JA1EM, JQ2UOZ, K5ALQ, K6GFJ, K6TA, K6UM, K7HC, KA8Q, KI6T, KI6WF, LA7XB, M0VNG, N2WB, N6OX, NN6L, NN6W, NU6T, NW6P, W3XQ, W4AOU, W5DNT, W5WT, W6BGK, W8SQ

W6EEN – NCDXF Educational Fund benefactor becomes a silent key



ON 16 JANUARY 2009, our friend and Foundation benefactor, Don Doughty, passed away from a stroke.

Don and his wife, Phyllis, generously began and added support over the years to our educational fund, recently renamed “The Don and Phyllis Doughty W6EEN/NCDXF Educational Fund.”

Don’s business background covered engineering, business and real estate development. He earned three degrees at the University of California, Berkeley, including a Ph.D. in mechanical

engineering. He founded Orindawoods in Orinda, CA, and was a founding director of Lafayette Savings and Loan. He was a licensed mechanical engineer as well as a licensed pilot.

Don is survived by his wife, Phyllis, numerous children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Don’s station in Bermuda Dunes was large and powerful, as was Don. There were many contests operated by numerous Ham friends and the Doughtys were always very generous hosts to those who came to operate or visit. Don was also a frequent visitor to Visalia and Dayton and anyone who had the opportunity to meet him was always greeted as if they were a long lost friend.

Our sympathy goes out to the Doughty family. Rest in peace, old friend.



Don Doughty, W6EEN

an appreciation by Dave Bell, W6AQ

WHENEVER I THINK OF DON I always remember the old English phrase, “Hail fellow, well met” because Don was a bigger-than-life character, friendlier, more outgoing and more welcoming than almost anybody I ever met. He had the biggest antenna farm, the most radios and more generosity in his heart than almost anyone I know.

Don loved DXing and contesting and showered the Northern California DX Foundation with support. Not only that, he loved everything about Amateur Radio and supported the ARRL so the hobby would be sure to expand, grow and survive. He even urged other Hams, including me, to do likewise.

I got the contesting bug from Don and spent many happy hours in his huge, well-engineered shack chasing points. But what those get-togethers were really about was camaraderie. Don loved being the host, whether for a few of us running a contest, or a huge gang from all over Southern California for a big barbecue. For several years, Don had his own Hamfest, right out under the patio roof and

around the pool and it wasn’t unusual for 150 Hams to show up. Don was always smiling.

Some folks thought that Phyllis Doughty had to put up with a lot, but to me, Phyllis always seemed to be a happy participant. One of Phyllis’ good friends, Helen Luttringer, Ron, K6XC’s wife, helped Phyllis in the kitchen, feeding the hungry hoard of contesters who showed up with regularity to go for a clean sweep or a top 10 finish. If Phyllis wasn’t having a good time, she sure fooled me. Here’s to you, Phyllis.

I first met Don at the International DX Convention in Visalia. I’d come into the bar of the Holiday Inn by myself and it was full of Hams, as usual. A guy I’d seen but didn’t know was sitting with a bunch of Hams from the NCDXF. He waved me over to an empty seat next to him. “Hi,” he said, “I’m Don. What’re you drinking?” I told him a Sapphire Martini, very dry, up with a twist, and Don said, “I like that.” A waitress appeared as if by magic and within a moment my drink was in front of me. I learned that night that Don’s drink was a perfect

Rob Roy, a concoction even more exotic than mine. I liked Don from that very first moment, and I’ve liked him ever since. Don Doughty will live in my memory and will bring a smile to my face for the rest of my days.

Thanks, Don, and 73.



Contributions

The **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA DX FOUNDATION** relies heavily upon the generosity of its members to fund various projects. We urge each member to consider making an annual contribution of US\$50 or its equivalent in foreign currency. However, we do not wish to exclude anyone from the **FOUNDATION** for financial reasons. If \$50 is not within your budget, then please give what other amount you can. Naturally, we welcome contributions in excess of \$50! The **NCDXF** is an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and all contributions are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law for U.S. taxpayers. Send your contribution to: **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA DX FOUNDATION**, P.O. Box 1328, Los Altos, CA 94023-1328, USA. You may also contribute and order supplies online via our secure server, visit www.ncdxf.org/donate.

Charles 'Rusty' Epps, W6OAT, retires from the NCDXF Board

IT WAS WITH MIXED EMOTIONS and deep regret that NCDXF accepted Rusty's resignation at its November 2008 board meeting. Rusty had been a board member since the mid 1970s and also served in various officer capacities, including president.

Rusty had the ability to gain respect easily and was not only highly thought of by the Board, but by the DX community as a whole. He has that uncommon ability to listen well and share his ideas and viewpoints in a non-confrontational manner, which gained him tremendous respect. His knowledge of DX gained over the years was extremely helpful as the decisions for funding by NCDXF are weighed on a case-by-case basis.

Rusty's Ham career began in 1958 with the Novice call of KN4BVD. Since then, Rusty has had an avid interest in DXing and contesting. Rusty's educational credentials and work related activities are quite broad and diversified as well. He attended MIT, completed graduate work at the Harvard Business School and attended law school in San Francisco.

Rusty was a driving force behind WRTC, CQP, the North American Sprint and other activities in the contest community. He was a founding member of NCCC and has served in various positions with that organization; he is also on the board of the YASME Foundation. His DXing activities include operations from Palmyra, Kingman, Nepal, Clipperton and Syria and he also participated in many contests over the years. Rusty has had the honor of being inducted into "The CQ DX Hall of Fame" as well as the "CQ Contest Hall of Fame."

Rusty epitomizes all of the things that many of us aspire to in this hobby and in life. He is quick to offer help and mentoring, but slow to criticize; he is an all around good guy. While he is no longer on our board, he will be a valuable resource for us on the



Rusty at his station with his helper, Bosco.

historical perspectives of the DX community. Rest assured that Rusty will continue to surface with new ideas for

both DX and contesting.

Thank you Rusty for all you have done!



Meeting JY1

— Tom McShane, NW6P
Secretary/Treasurer NCDXF

IN THE EARLY 1980S I was working for my company as an exhibitor at a trade show in London. We were told that important visitors would come after normal hours and that we should not leave early so we could demonstrate the equipment to the VIPs.

I was with another employee in our exhibit booth when a large group approached. I immediately recognized Prince Phillip of the U.K. and King Hussein of Jordan. We gave the demonstration and answered questions.

As the group began to leave I approached King Hussein and said, "Your Majesty, I am November Whiskey Six Papa."

The King extended his hand and said, "And I am Juliet Yankee One. My handle is Hussein... Henry Uniform Sierra Sierra Echo India November. QTH Amman. What is your handle and QTH?"

I replied, "My handle is Tom... Tango Oscar Mike. QTH San Francisco."

JY1 then turned to the group and said, "Please go ahead. I have important Amateur Radio business to discuss with my new friend, Tom."

We then spoke about Ham radio, equipment at our respective stations and what a wonderful hobby this was. He turned to his assistant and I was presented with JY1's card. One side read "Hussein, The Palace, Amman." The other side had Arabic script, which I assumed was the same information.

Hussein invited me to visit Jordan and operate Ham radio but I was not able to take JY1 up on his offer. I did, however, work a group of Hams during CQWW SSB a few months later operating in Jordan as guest of the King.





TI9KK — ISLA DEL COCO a DXpedition photo log





XT2C — 56,287 QSOs and a lot of fun!

ON OUR LAST EVENING IN Zanzibar the question arose “Where do we go next?” We wanted to return to Africa but after two DXpeditions close to the equator (Zanzibar, 5H1C, in 2006 and French Guyana, TO7C, in 2005) we thought it might be wise to be closer to Europe to compensate for the bad propagation conditions we experienced in Zanzibar. After having searched the Internet, having checked the cluster and being in contact with friends, we decided on Burkina Faso. All that was needed was to get the right operators, find a hotel or guest-house and get the radio license.

Preparation

We needed a lot of space since we expected to have about 10 operators with several stations running on all bands. Jan Harders, DJ8NK, recommended the OK Inn, which the German crew of DL7DF used in 2000. The hotel is located only few miles from the airport and we were assured that electricity was not an issue because the hotel had its own power generator. The hotel also confirmed that we could use two hectares of undeveloped terrain to install our antennas. The hotel also had an access point to wireless LAN.

With respect to timing, we wanted to take advantage of the good propa-

gation around the equinox, but then changed our mind. January was selected in order to favour low band propagation and to avoid the hot and humid rainy season.

About eight months before departing Frank Pouchin, F4AJQ, be-

gan to form the team. It was a difficult task as several members of the F6KOP core team were not available and we were rather short on CW operators. Finally a group of five operators from the F6KOP club were ready: Gerard Debelle, F2VX; Jean-Paul Sallien, F8BJI; Savoldi Franck, F5TVG; Bernard Chereau, F9IE, and Frank, F4AJQ. Later, two members from the Clipperton DX Club joined us: Gerard Jacot, F2JD, just back from 3YØX, and Tuduri Alain, F5LMJ, returning from Bhutan.

During Ham Radio 2006 in Friedrichshafen, Germany, Gerard, F2JD, presented his 3YØX teammate Bob Grimmick, N6OX, to the team and, after a great dinner, Bob was ready to join the team on the spot. John Trummer, F5VHQ, brought along Dieter Kritzer, OE8KDK. Finally Bill Beyer, N2WB, another 3YØX teammate joined us. Team leader Frank was stressed: 10 operators, three nationalities and five new members.

A critical factor during the preparation phase was to obtain the radio license; not an easy task in Africa, but after many phone calls, faxes and e-mails, we found the right people and ob-



tained single call signs for everyone and the expedition call of XT2C.

Every Friday the entire F6KOP team was busy with equipment preparation, antenna and support material. Several telescopic antenna masts were designed and mounted. Spider beams were assembled and radials cut to support the Titanex vertical for low bands.

Alain, F6ABN, a schoolmaster from a school near Bordeaux, France, contacted Gerard, F2VX, about a partnership with a school in Ouagadougou, saying the students wanted to collect pens and have us deliver them to the schoolmaster in Burkina Faso. Our whole team was delighted by the idea and even arranged with the Bordeaux DX group for live radio contacts between the two schools.

Getting together

On Saturday, 6 January 07 the whole team assembled at the airport for departure. Upon arrival in Ouagadougou we encountered problems because of our baggage; even though we had all authorizations and licences, Customs confiscated the papers and requested us to visit their offices by Monday morning.

The next morning everyone was busy with antenna placement. We found a good place for the 40M and





80M slopers at the water tower (about 25 meters high) at the rear of the garden; three out of the four spider beams, one multi-band vertical and three slopers were mounted.

On Monday morning we contacted Mr. Zabre, our friend at the administration ARTEL who helped us with licenses. He agreed to join us at the Customs office and all problems were instantly solved. Mr. Zabre joined us at the hotel, welcomed everyone and made his first radio contact with our station.

Operating

Bernard, F9IE, started the first pile-ups on 20M CW. The logging program Wintest was working fine but unfortunately we could not put all stations in the network; some of the bungalows were more than 100 meters away.

Everything was running smoothly and after four days of operating we had 22,557 QSOs in the log; 502 on 160M.

Conditions were still good, but five members were badly sick. With a reduced number of operators, nights were long and exhausting for the remaining team members due to the never-ending huge pile-ups.

After a week of pileups, all of us were close to our physical limitations; even the strongest team members were exhausted. The propagation was not as good as our first days of operation — low bands 40M to 160M were very noisy and signals on the higher bands during daytime had a strong QSB.

John, F5VHQ, joined us for the final run and in order to further push

our QSOs on 40M, we mounted his home-brewed four-element log periodic wire-antenna for that band resulting in huge pileups to Japan, stateside and Europe. Approaching the end of the DXpedition we tried different modes such as SSTV, PSK63 even RTTY at low bands.

Our daily rate was impacted by the fact that several rare DXpeditions, such as VU7, were on the air and we had to adopt our frequency plan accordingly.

XT2C exceeded our target and logged 56,287 QSOs.

Connecting schools

A small delegation of team members met a member of the Ouagadougou Partage humanitarian association as well as the director of the school to conclude the project “a pencil, a pen for Ouaga.” At the school they distributed the educational stationery collected in France and in the afternoon a dozen students and five teachers visited us at the hotel. On 20M SSB from the XT2C station they contacted the school in Pompignac in France for a Q&A session. This was a great time for everyone!



E44M — A DXpedition in a war zone

Pasquale La Gamba, IZ8IYX

EVERY DXER DREAMS OF THE CALL with the question: “Would you consider being part of our DXpedition to a rare one?” Indeed, this was the case in August 2008 for a few lucky Hams. And the rare one was E4, Palestine. There was no way this group could imagine that a few short months later they would be operating from Palestine in the middle of a war.

The beginning

The story began with a phone call from Giorgio Minguzzio, IZ4AKS. From that point on it was a nonstop journey of planning, preparation, problem solving and more problem solving. This is part of the untold story of any major DXpedition.

A few days before our scheduled departure, the conflict in the Gaza region intensified and jeopardized the entire operation. With hopes the situation would improve, the E44M schedule remained intact. The major problem facing the group was how to cross the border between Israel and Palestine; it is one thing to be a tourist, but quite another to travel with a group transporting radio equipment into an area engaged in a military conflict. How do you explain this to border guards? The Gaza and conflict zone was only an hour's drive so delicate diplomacy was the only solution.

So, on 1 January 1, 2009, Giorgio, IZ4AKS; Simone Bizzarri, IZ8BTV; Aurelio Bello, IZØEGM, and I,

IZ8IYX, met at the Rome airport to obtain boarding passes for a very high security EL AL flight to Tel Aviv. After successfully completing an extremely intense two-hour interview, the group received permission to board the flight only to get word that the conflict had intensified.

Welcome

Landing at Israel's Ben-Gurion International Airport, we were greeted by Roby who was holding a sign which read, “Italian Radio Amateurs.” Shortly after, Vinicio Ravizza, IK2CIO, arrived on a flight from Milan. Salvador Carol Tafall, C31CT, and Les Fabianski, SP3DOI, had arrived earlier from Barcelona. With our group now complete, we proceeded with our escort to the famous eight-meter-high wall dividing Palestine and Israel.

After successfully navigating the border we arrived at our hotel in the very heart of Bethlehem and realized the enormous hotel was almost empty. That turned out to be to our advantage, allowing us to maneuver on the 11th floor hotel roof without



too much scrutiny. We began unloading the materials we brought with us and inventoried the equipment previously shipped and stored at the hotel. Thanks to the expertise of Vinicio, IK2CIO, we had Internet access to communicate to our pilot station, Arturo d' Aprile, IK7JWY, who updated our website.

Operations

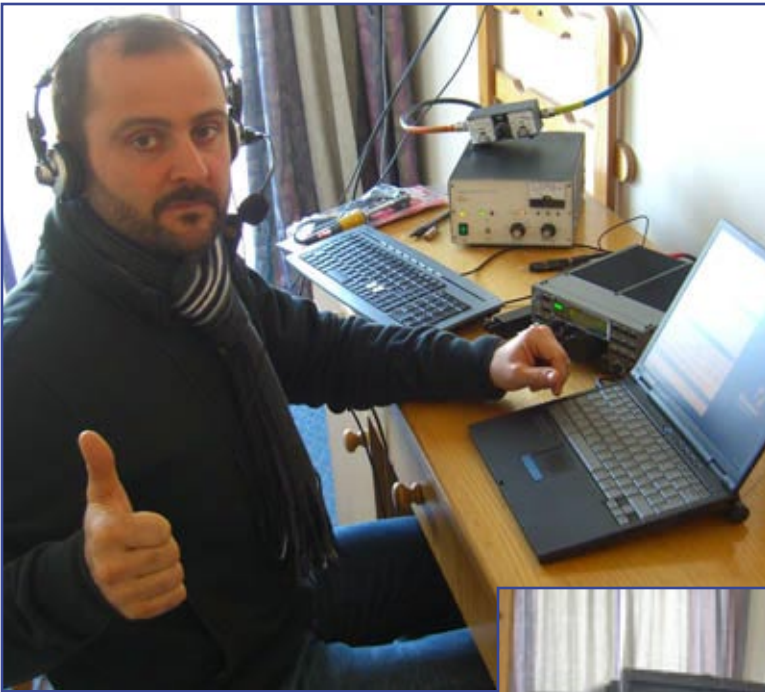
On 2 January the group began the day at 6:30 a.m. planning the location of the various antennas. Despite cold temperatures, the team worked continually erecting the numerous antennas. That evening the operators faced extremely noisy conditions on all bands.

The next day part of the team spent the entire day on the roof attempting to eliminate the atmospheric noise plaguing our Icom Pro III, Icom 7000, Icom 7400 and Elecraft K2. The result of our effort was very discouraging with constant high noise levels.

Despite the noise, the entire team continued to operate in shifts. No one had yet left the hotel; meals were served at the same table with an unvaried menu. The only relaxing time was spent chatting with the Palestinian people inside our hotel.

At last, we managed to discover the source of the high noise level threatening our operation: one of





the three hotel elevators. The hotel's heat pumps also increased the noise level when they were operating. We soon reached the conclusion that the hotel's electrical grounding system was totally inadequate and causing our noise problem.

On 5 January we received the reassurance from our guide that we could travel the streets. Some team members shopped for noise filters and finally found a telephone shop with electric Internet filters. We weren't sure they would help, but we hoped for a miracle.

Walking through the streets of Bethlehem we, by chance, arrived at the Church of the Nativity, where tradition marks the birthplace of Jesus Christ.

After returning to our operating site, we connected a filter to each radio; however, the filters provided little help in eliminating the noise.

The time from 6-9 January flew by as we attempted to meet the needs of the North and South American community and, despite the line noise, strong signals from Europe and increased tiredness, we did our very best to increase the QSO rates to America. There were also numerous demonstrations organized against Israel and tension was growing in Bethlehem; we avoided going out



because of the increased fighting between police and demonstrators.

We did our very best under the noisy conditions to meet everyone's needs and expectations even though it was almost impossible to follow propagation to all parts of the world on all bands each day of the operation.

Friends

As an aside we found some spare moments to taste some excellent Palestinian kebab. Early in the afternoon of 10 January our guide accompanied us to meet our Israeli friends Ros Bunyat-Zade, 4Z5LA, and Dov Gavish, 4Z4DX, at a restaurant in the Arab quarters of Jerusalem; it was exceptional. At that very moment, while hostilities were high in the Gaza region, we enjoyed a time of peace and friendship with our Israeli and Palestinian friends. This is the real

spirit of Amateur Radio.

A few hours later, after taking pictures with our IARC members friends, we returned to the Palestinian territory and spent the night working the low bands.

Heading home

Early on 11 January we began the chore of disassembling all the antennas and we left some of the equipment and numerous ARRL publications with our friends. With the help of our Israeli friends and their commitment to Amateur Radio, along with our Palestinian friends, we hope

our E4 activity will continue. Additional equipment was given to our Israeli friends as a token of our gratitude for their support.

At the Tel Aviv airport we again faced intense security and after four hours of interrogation we boarded our flight to Rome.

We express our sincere gratitude to the Amateur

Radio community for helping us accomplish our goals. In addition, we thank our sponsors, the IARC community and our families who bore the burden of worry during the time of our operating near the Gaza conflict. Also, we thank the ARI association who supported our activity with our IARC friends along with all our other friends worldwide who made this DXpedition possible.



Activating Arwad Island — YK9SV

Manos G. Darkadakis, SV1IW

IT WAS JUST BEFORE NEW YEAR'S Eve 2006 when I started to think of a Greek DXpedition outside of the country. Researching countries near and far, rare and semi rare, Syria soon became one of my best attractions. First, it was not that far; second, it was rarely activated, especially on the WARC and the low bands, and, third, I knew Omar Shabsigh, YK1AO, the national society president, whom I had met in Davos in 2005 and who could offer me guidance. It proved afterward that he offered me a lot more.

Why not?

My first approach was to operate from Damascus for about 10 days. There was a possibility of acceptance so I began to put all the pieces together and while discussing it with local Hams, one of them had an idea: why not activate Arwad Island? It was a new IOTA reference number but had not been activated. I posed that question to the authorities in Damascus and they replied, "Yes." Their only terms were that we needed to be accompanied by a member from the Syrian Scientific Technical Amateur Radio Society (SSTARS) and a member of the Syrian Telecommunication Establishment (STE) during all of our days of operation.

That is how YK9SV, the first ever all-Greek DXpedition out of the country, was started. It took more than 10 months of planning, and to have a better idea of the area where we would operate, Cliff Sakalis, SV1JG, made a 3-day trip to Damascus and Arwad Island to inspect the place and determine whether we should operate from a house or in seaside tents.

We decided to operate from two tents using generators that could be installed on the southeast part of the island — fortunately we never operated from there.

After making some rough calculations regarding the costs, we determined that for a team of seven

to eight persons the total cost would be around €25,000 (about US\$33,500).

This included some equipment that would be left with SSTARS.

Research to find operators for the trip produced seven people. We developed operating plans, estimated propagation charts and chose radios, antennas and amplifiers.

On 31 October we flew to Amman and then to Damascus, arriving at 11 p.m. Fortunately, Omar, YK1AO, and other SSTARS members met us and helped us clear Customs.

Getting started

The next morning we hit the road to Tartous where we loaded our equipment onto a small boat and left for the island. We arrived on the island at 3:30 p.m. and while unloading the equipment we were informed that, thanks to the Mayor of Arwad and Governor of Tartous, we were offered two rooms in the local STE building. No tents, no generators and no gasoline would make things easier for us!

We moved everything to the STE building and started building and installing the antennas. Soon the first spider for 10-12-15-17-20M was up followed by the 40M dipole. Operations started at 14:14Z. The team offered me the first QSO which I made with Jürgen Lauterbach, DF2NS, on 14.190MHz. During the first hour of the operation we faced our first problems. The STE people in the building were picking up RF interference in a telephone used to check the quality of the phone connections between Arwad and Tartous. George Pilalis, SV1QN, quickly solved the problem



by installing two ferrite beads at the long unshielded cable connecting the phone with the check point.

YK9SV was on the air and the pileup was really huge. The first station operating on 20M was soon followed by another one operating on the 40M band. Some operators stayed on the island overnight; the rest took the boat back to Tartous, staying at the hotel and returning early the next morning to install the rest of the antennas.

We installed the WARC spider beam and dipoles for 80M and 160M overlooking the sea and then rearranged the two operating rooms so we could have three stations on the air on various bands and modes. Pileups were holding nicely and logs started to fill.

Changing weather

On Saturday morning Cliff, SV1JG; Spyros Mastrovasilis, SV1RC, and I prepared and installed a quarter-wave vertical for 80M. The antenna was working excellently, but not for long. Up until Tuesday everything ran smoothly and the logs were filling nicely but that evening Cliff saw a slight difference in wind speed and sent an SMS to the operators on the island to keep an eye on the weather and antennas. Around 3 a.m. the wind blew over the 80M vertical, falling on top of the WARC spider

beam. Nothing happened to the 80M vertical but the WARC spider broke into several pieces and its aluminum pole was damaged from the fall.

We tried to recover whatever we could and install a 30M dipole to keep working on that band but the 80M vertical could not be reinstalled because the wind was still blowing. We were starting to emphasize RTTY as there was a lot of demand for this mode. The weather situation did not change until Friday when the wind finally quieted down and we installed the 80M vertical again on Saturday evening; it was not meant to last. Early Sunday morning the wind blew so hard (100-110 km/h) that the pole broke at two joints. So did the pole holding the 40M, 30M and 17M dipoles but it remained in place. The wind also transformed the 5-band spider beam for 10M-12M-15M-17M and 20M into a "spider wreck." By dawn there was nothing left except the dipoles!

We couldn't reach the island to relieve the three operators on the night shift so we spent most of the day in



Tartous waiting out the weather. The weather was better on Monday, so we managed to get to the island first thing in the morning.


Success

The operation ended at 05:57Z while George, SV1RP, made the last QSO with Minoru Nakajima, JR1TNE, on 17M CW. We took the antennas down and packed the equipment and around 1 p.m. had everything loaded into the boat.

After all that, the operation was successful, considering weather and propagation conditions. We operated

Band	Total
1.8	1,313
3.5	1,336
7	5,906
10	2,845
14	6,895
18	4,473
21	2,121
24	81
Total	24,970

Mode	Total
CW	9,857
SSB	12,928
PSK31	59
RTTY	2,126
Total	24,970

for 10½ days from the island, resulting in a total of 25,000 QSOs. 

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| 130. WRTC 2006 Florianopolis
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Allphin, K4UEE (DVD) | 145. 5T5DC Mauritania 2008 (21
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