

DXTalk

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The propagational mid-season period on HF is that exciting time of the year when high bands can yield some amazing openings. This year was no exception and the active chasers were rewarded with some 'pipe-line' openings to Africa. From the mid March to early April, stations from West, Central and Southern Africa were booming in, especially on 15 m and 10 m bands. The beauty of the 'pipe-line' opening is that strange phenomenon where a distant station has no real propagation to any part of the world, other than VK! We can hear that DX station really loud, and since no one else is calling, he can hear us even at the QRP level.

This was surely the case with S01WS whose endless CQs on 15 m band via long path were only answered by VK2 and VK3s. Another loud one was ZS9M from Pretoria with a killer signal on 10 m. At the same time, many of us worked Baldur DJ6SI and Jan DJ8NK from Togo, who were active as 5V7BD and 5V7JH and an easy catch on 12 m.

The 17 m band was in particularly amazing shape. It would take no more than a few calls to generate a pileup of always keen Europeans. This band is open almost 24 hours per day to *somewhere* – so it should be monitored as often as possible. If you turn your antenna to Europe via long path, you can easily hear your echo (your signal travelling all around the globe) which is often a sign that you are heard well over South/Central America as well as West Africa. Try it – it's fun.

IOTA Activations

T88TI, T88GI, T88XX. Tobi Island OC-296 is the latest addition to IOTA programme. Tobi is an island

in the Palauan state of Hatohebei. Population is in steady decline from about 80 in 1962 to around 7 inhabitants at the last count. Most of them live on the island's west side and speak Tobian. The total land area is less than one square kilometre and the highest point is just 6 metres above sea level. From March 11 to 13, Tobi Island was on air thanks to three seasoned IOTA activators: Nando IT9YRI, Claudio I1SNW and Mike K9AJ who sailed two days to reach their destination. They made many chasers happy, and they were an easy catch for us.

INDONESIA: a firework of activations from various islands! YF1AR/4 was on Enggano Island OC-204, YB4IR/7 operated from Karimata OC-269 and YB3MM/p visited Gili Getting Island OC-237.

Our Indonesian friends are keen island activators who operate on both phone and CW. Despite the low power and simple vertical antennas they are often an easy catch for us on 15 m and 20 m. To their credit, once they setup their operating site on an island, they invite and encourage local amateurs to join them on the air, using their own callsigns. Our YB friends hop islands using very irregular commercial transport and are often required to cancel or change plans on short notice. When you hear such IOTA activation on air, do give them a call and keep in mind how hard our Indonesian friends work to give you a new one. Respect!

The one that got away: DXpedition to **PQ0T** Trindade Island, Brasil. April 2-7. Trindade and Martim Vaz is an archipelago located about 1,200 kilometres from the main land, in the Southern Atlantic Ocean. The archipelago has a total area of 10 km² and a population of 32 – all of them

Brazilian Navy personnel. The archipelago consists of five islands and several rocks. The team of five Brazilian operators spent four days on the island under strict supervision of the Navy.

We all knew that this one is going to be tough for VK but nevertheless, we hoped for a miracle: a killer signal on an empty band, their Yagi pointed in our direction and those two magical words: "VK ONLY".

The reality was harsh: not a trace of PQ0T signal on any band which was really a result of low power setup and simple antennas. The time difference was also working against us.

VK5CE/p St Peter Island, South Australia OC-220. It has been many years since the last operation from St Peter Island. Craig operated from March 29 to April 1 in a typical one-man and a generator style.

What a show! In just four days Craig logged 4,194 QSOs under extremely difficult conditions. I managed to secure an exclusive interview with Craig just in time for the deadline for DX Talk:

Craig – what made you go to St Peter Island and how long it took you to plan/prepare the operation?

I decided to go there because this IOTA had not been activated for 10 years. Even though 27.7% of IOTA chasers worked and confirmed this island, the fact that 10 years had passed meant that I knew a four day DXpedition would keep me busy with lots of people wanting this one. I also wanted to do this because it is my 'local' VK5 IOTA. After activating another VK5 island OC261 two years ago (which also hadn't been activated 10 years ago prior), I want to make sure they are activated for the hunters. I'll also be

looking to activate OC-228 in VK5 which hasn't had a proper IOTA DXpedition for 11 years.

This DXpedition didn't take long to equip because I have all of the DXpedition equipment ready to go. I was able to find a boat and captain quite quickly but the permission from the South Australian Government's Department of Parks took four months of regular negotiation between offices in Ceduna and Adelaide. Rules for accessing this island changed dramatically in October 2014 and so it was a lot of hard work to get final approval.

Apart from landing permit, what was the most challenging aspect of the operation?

The most challenging part of this DXpedition was that it was an uninhabited island and I had to bring every conceivable part of life support with me and I was responsible for every aspect of life support and DX operation. The extreme heat at the very beginning of the DXpedition meant that I had to endure 42.5 C in the tent for two days and deal with just 4 to 5 hours sleep per night.

What was your greatest fear?

The greatest fear was that this island had a dense population of Black Tiger Snakes which are venomous and the captain said he has seen them living right on the beach.

And the highlight?

Being able to work 1000 QSOs per day, to work QRP stations in Europe, people running modest 50 W dipole stations in the UK and mobile stations in the USA. I figured that anyone who needed OC-220 now has it.

What have you learned from this activation?

This DXpedition reminded me to always give 10 m band a try before 15 m. The openings to North America on 10 m in the mornings were great from east to west

coast and the openings in the late afternoon/early evening to Europe were fantastic.

Where do you go next?

There are 10 VK IOTAs on my radar to visit over the upcoming years. It's a bit hard to say which one will be next because I have fishing lines in the water, some have taken the bait and so it just depends on which fish I reel in first!

Thank you Craig for sharing your excitement with AR readers- we wish you calm seas on the next one and looking forward working you soon from another Australian Island.

Your feedback – more on Marion Island, ZS8

"I always read the DX column first, no matter what the magazine, as this is where my amateur radio heart lies. I am not a great, or even particularly good DXer but I certainly can get enthusiastic at times.

The story in your April column concerning David VK3EW and his ZS8 Marion Island CW QSO was marvellous, although the story line is, very possibly, only something a committed DXer would fully understand and appreciate.

Now anyone who has played DX for some time has at least one story that they will recall forever, and mine concerned, yes, ZS8 Marion Island. But not in either the phone or CW modes, but rather a digital mode, to wit JT65.

For some obscure reason I love JT65, and often scroll around the sub-bands looking for a new entity on the mode or even just a new station to work. And so I was on 5 February, 2014, at 0723 UTC, on the 15 metre band. Nothing was showing on the waterfall, so I tried a few CQ calls, hoping for a response but not particularly confident. Then, after one such call, a station responded – ZS8Z Marion Island, operator David whose home call is ZS1BCE.

Now, over very many years of DXing I had grown accustomed to the old but very valid statement

– WFWL (Work first, worry later), so I did just that. I made a good QSO and immediately rushed to the internet to confirm the call, and everything else about it, was indeed kosher. It was, and my Marion Island JT65 QSO gave me two new ones, a first ZS8 on 15 metres, and a new entity worked on digital.

The card came along in due course as did LOTW confirmation. Again, only a true DX lover could appreciate the happiness this whole episode created in the VK3FM household – half of it, anyway!"
Ernie Walls VK3FM.

DX0P Spratly Island. Not less than six countries make the possession claims on Spratly: China, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei and Taiwan. From amateur radio perspective, and for the sake of DXCC credit, all contacts with Spratly count as one single entity. However, in reality, an activation of Spratly is often seen as a political or even military statement. And this is precisely the case of DX0P activation which took place from April 16-20. An all-Philippine team landed on the Pagasa, the second largest Spratly Island. Pagasa is under control of Philippines since 1968. The team needed not to worry about transport and supplies – all the logistic was courtesy of the Philippine Navy. DX0P website proudly includes number of photos of Offshore Combat Force Philippine Fleet, including heavily armed personnel. Propaganda or not, we, the amateurs, would not be too picky – while DX0P was fairly weak in VK2, quite a few managed to work them on high bands.

At the time of this report, the total QSO number was not known but judging by the band activity and preliminary numbers published online, it will be around 6,000.

Spratly is not a particularly difficult one for us, but certainly is from both Americas.

TX5P Clipperton Island. Without much fanfare, Aland F6BFH appeared on the air on 20 m CW.

Alan and his XYL Daniele are part of scientific expedition to Clipperton with duties which include research, communication and support. A simple setup consisting of a 100 W radio with a dipole is all he's got on his disposal. But as we say, an excellent CW operator is worth 30 dB, so getting in his log was not that difficult. The trick is (as always!)

to be on the right frequency at the right time, before the TX5P is spotted on the cluster. 14.045 MHz is Alan's favourite frequency so call him 5-10 up. I am probably the only person on the planet who missed 2013. TX5K megaDXpedition so getting Clipperton as an ATNO number 308 (all-time-new-one) was such a thrill.

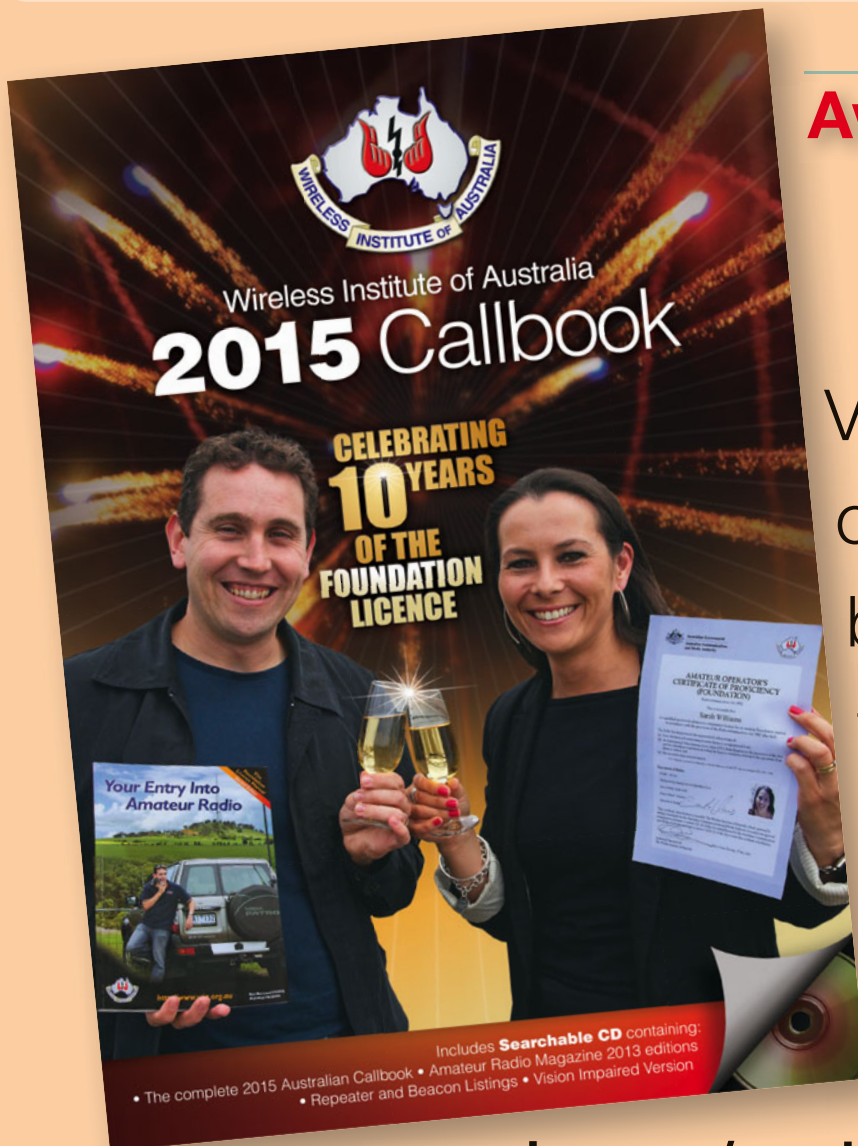
Unfortunately this is all we had time for, so until next month:

Good hunting and CU on the air!

Editor's Note: For unknown reasons, Nick's column disappeared into the Internet black hole and missed inclusion in the print and the initial Digital Editions. We are working with Nick to ensure that a recurrence does not occur.



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