

DX-peditions

– yearn for distant lands

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It is the darkest moment of the night. I have shut out all disturbing sounds and sights from my consciousness. I am focused on hearing even the smallest flap of a butterfly's wings.

I do not perceive any sound or movement from my nearby surroundings. It is completely silent. My only companions whom I share the whole house with are a green lizard and a huge black spider that is clinging to the wall in front of me.

By now the 44 inhabitants of the island that are 200 metres below me down a steep hillside are asleep in their homes.

Cell phones do not work here, there is no Internet, I am alone, completely and totally alone. Around me lay the immeasurably vast Pacific Ocean with thousands of kilometres that separate me from the nearest continent.

But am I alone after all?

The headset is my only source of sound, it's crackling and crash sounds enter my head as I slowly rotate the biggest black tuning knob on my radio. The frequency indicator is glowing as well as small green LED's built into each knob. The atmosphere could be



*This wooden house was my home.
I erected two three element yagi beams nearby.*

called ghostly, even depressing, if I had not of become accustomed to this type of situation over the decades.

Now I hear a small, soft voice. It is familiar to me and comes from the other side of the globe, from a distance of 16000 kilometres.

My wife is calling me, her voice grows stronger and I can distinguish her words. She calls me by my name and my Pitcairn call sign VP6BR. I call her back and she hears my voice. We can talk now in peace for an hour about our family matters.

All other stations that were hearing our conversation keep silent. This is polite, because they know that I have not heard my wife's voice for about a month. We have a special moment just for the two of us. We call it our "home traffic" and so does everybody else.

It is good to be a ham, especially when other means of communications simply do not exist.

Yearn for distant lands is great

Man is curious by nature. Even a small child desires to explore his surrounding areas, to visit all the rooms that are in the house, even to inspect all their corners. When a person grows the longing for distant lands also grows. The best thing to do is visit places that few have visited before. At the same time it is important to keep in contact with home and with friends.

VP6BR
PITCAIRN ISLAND

Many hams likewise feel the same way. We often watch travel programmes on TV and we also like to read travel books that we have found. We even plan trips more and more farther away from home until we reach the limit where no farther trip is possible without leaving mother Earth.

As a kid in high school I found the distant island of Pitcairn on the map. The island is merely a tip of an extinct volcano rising 327 metres above the sea level. Below the sea's surface the volcano extends to a depth of several kilometres. Geologically, it belongs to French Polynes-



sia with Mangareva as the closest island to Pitcairn lying 500 kilometres away.

Some years later a happy incident brought a nice book on Pitcairn, "Paradise on the port side" into my hands. It was written by a Danish travelling writer Arne Falk-Rønne. After that I was hooked!

When the right opportunity arose and without a moment's hesitation I decided that I must undertake the journey that I had been dreaming of for decades.

The preparations took nine months

The more distant the place and the worse the travel connections, the more time you must set aside for planning and preparing for the journey. Pitcairn does not have an airport nor regular maritime traf-

This view was taken from the top of 45 m tower where I climbed after having disassembled the radio station..



Adamstown is home to 44 inhabitants of Pitcairn. There is plenty of room for everyone.



Pitcairn boatshed is there greeting all visitors as their first sight.

fic. The tiny port of Pitcairn, Bounty Bay, is unable to take any other ships than its own long boats.

Due to the result of ancient volcanic eruptions the waters surrounding Pitcairn are very dangerous. The island is surrounded by lava islets and underwater cliffs, happily though Blue Star Line's container ships pass by Pitcairn and are able to pick up and drop off passengers and supplies during their few hour stopovers.

Making travel arrangements was not an easy task as regular mail takes a long time to reach Pitcairn. I needed to receive the permit for landing on Pitcairn from their island council whereas the radio amateur licence would need to come from the Governor's office in Auckland, New Zealand.

At last I could pack my two suitcases and start my adventure to the distant unknown island, but not until I had spent a sleepless night reducing excess weight from my suitcases. At one point, my wife had enough of it and left for the bedroom saying: "You are a crazy man!"

A journey to the other side is long

The 37 hour flight with its two stops on the way was exhausting but finally I had reached my destination, well, almost.

More precisely, I had arrived in Auckland.

I collected the licence for the call sign that I had applied for, VP6BR, and started the long wait for the container ship at my friend Martin's ZL1ANJ place. After two weeks I boarded the Melbourne Star, a big container ship as a passenger. This ship was to be my home for the next eight days at sea.

On captain's permission I hoisted a modest dipole antenna on one of the ship's masts. A mere 100 watts of RF power gave enough punch to make contacts all over the world. At sea you do not need big power nor big antennas as the salty sea water is the very best electrical ground there is, as funny as it sounds. You will have a strong transmitted signal if your antenna is tuned and the soil conducts electricity in an efficient way. During this time a couple of thousand contacts were easily logged as there was not much else to do on the ship to cut short the long days.

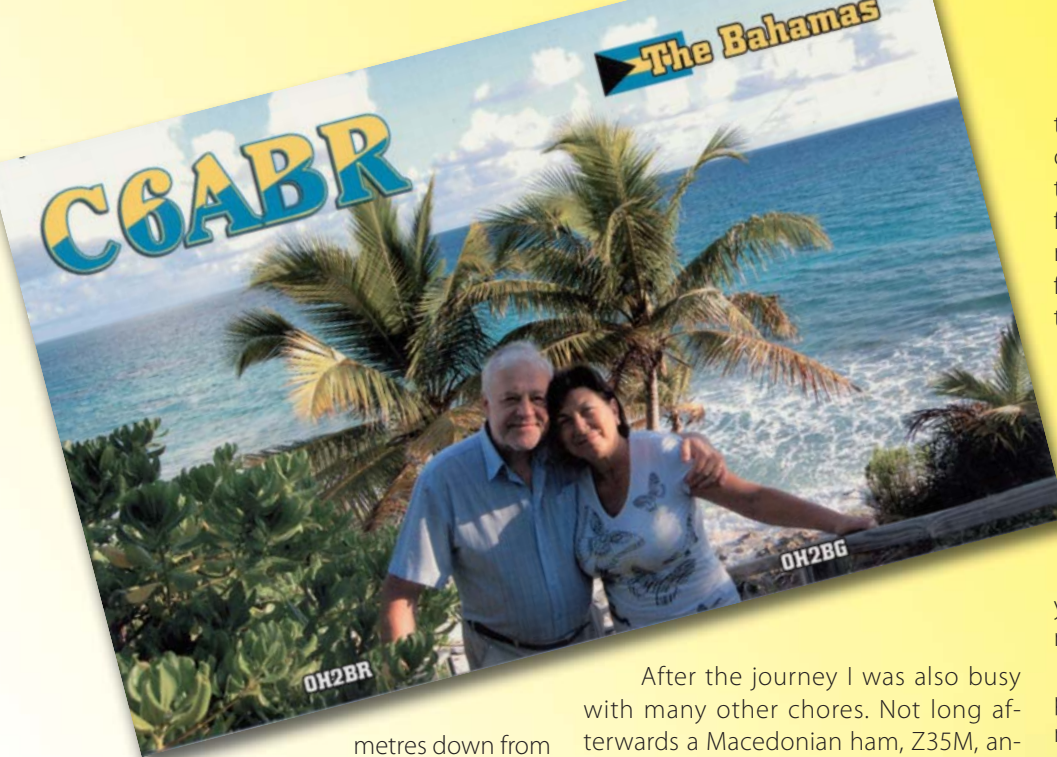
At this point, I had a great hunger for radio contacts.

Now the fun begins

Arriving at Pitcairn Island was a great moment. Now I met in person my hosts, Tom VP6TC and Betty VP6YL, with whom I had had radio contacts about thirty years prior and had received their QSL cards to confirm those contacts.

On the first day I took a tour around the island with Tom, VP6TC. That did not take a long time since the island is quite small, only one by two miles. During that time I noticed that the edges of the ancient volcano crater were very steep.

I decided to establish my radio station at the maritime radio station house. It was quite a long distance from Adamstown where the 44 inhabitants of Pitcairn live. Its advantage was a superb location on the highest levelled area on the island. I could see the Pacific Ocean almost everywhere around me but it was only 300



towards Europe. QSO's were made as often as I managed to do so while putting tourism with my XYL in its rightful first place. Again it was good to meet old radio friends. Many new friends got their first QSO with the Bahamas and again there was a flow of QSL requests.

DXpeditioning is for everybody

Any ham can go for a DXpedition. If you are living in Finland, you can start taking the easy route to Aland Islands, OH0. After that you can go a bit further, to Market Reef, OJ0. As your appetite grows, your skills develop and you gain more experience and the journeys can become longer.

Being able to manage pileups will improve as your brain adapts to tackle the new challenges. You need not be embarrassed about your performance as a radio operator, on the contrary, you can enjoy working through the pileups even now, while seeing the chaos on the bands caused by you signing your call sign.

On a more general level perhaps the most important benefit from the DXpeditions is that you get to know other cultures and peoples, often the local hams as well. You can learn to understand their way of life and their perception of the world. They may also become lifelong friends, with whom your connection may remain vital. Radio really does connect people everywhere on our globe in a very fine way!

P.S. I would like to note a very important thing for me. After my Pitcairn journey my XYL Loretta passed her amateur radio exam and received her own call sign OH-2BG. Now she does not have to go to another ham's station to contact me when I am away on a trip.

metres down from where I was. In a way, the whole island was my antenna tower.

Radio contacts were pouring in such abundance that I sometimes even lost my voice, but then I had an escape – telegraphy (CW) or digital modes. I did not have to speak while using them so it was easy to make contacts and eat and drink at the same time. The contacts kept flowing in as I was busy writing call signs in the computer logbook.

The computer took care of transmitting CW. It did a much better job at doing that and never got tired. On the other hand, copying the call signs in the cacophony of radio signals is a job best suited for humans as the computer software can easily get confused.

The radio propagation was absolutely great. Sun spot maximum was at its peak so the timing for my journey was perfectly placed in the sun's eleven year solar cycle. I spent three months in an ecstatic state of mind and I did not need any artificial stimulants at all.

My good feeling was motivated by the fact that the radio amateurs I had contact with were expressing their immense gratitude to me as the donor of a new DXCC country, Pitcairn Island. The best reward for giving is a happy state of mind they say. That is so true.

DXpedition continues at home

At home I was met by a cornucopia of letters containing QSL requests for VP6BR. I had worked approximately 21500 different stations. On the average I had made 2.6 QSOs with each station. There were in total about 11000 QSL requests by mail. It was quite a large undertaking to finish replying to them all with my own VP6BR QSL card.

After the journey I was also busy with many other chores. Not long afterwards a Macedonian ham, Z35M, announced that he had made a world record in making more amateur radio contacts than anyone else during a one year period. A few weeks later he reported that he had made only a new European record because VP6BR had made the new world record.

Well, I had no other choice than report my achievement to the Guinness Book of World Records. Before I could do that though I had to get many confirmations from highly respected amateur radio operators and associations to prove that those 56239 QSO's had really been made from Pitcairn. It took another two years before the diploma actually arrived and I could put it on my wall. A nice prize for a journey requiring such a great input!

Since then I have continued travelling with my radio as often as possible. In May 2011 I had a nice vacation week on Eleuthera, in the Bahama Islands. My radio was with me, of course, and the rental QTH was located at the beach looking

Hamspeak

band	frequency band
copy	get a call sign correct for logging a QSO
DXCC	award programme established by the American Radio Relay League (ARRL)
ham	radio amateur
pileup	a great number of stations calling a rare station
QSL	confirmation of a QSO
QSO	radio contact
QTH	location of a radio station
work	make radio contacts
XYL	wife

Links

- <http://www.425dxn.org/>
- <http://www.ac6v.com/dxpeditions.htm>
- <http://dx-world.net/>
- <http://www.qsl.net/oh2br/>

Italian DX website
DXpedition sites compiled by AC6V
news about DXpeditions
my Pitcairn pages