

The DX Bulletin

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H.I.DX.A. AMATEUR RADIO AND SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION TO HEARD ISLAND - 1983

by Jim Smith, VK9NS

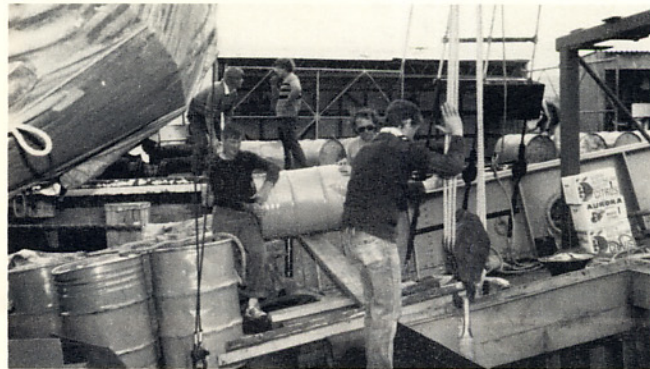
TO THE DXER, there can be no doubt that Heard Island was on most wanted lists...there seemed to be little point in carrying out a survey to find out if it was needed or not! As outlined elsewhere, I started to look into the possibility of amateur radio from there. In 1980, the Heard Island DX Association was formed in order to deal with the Australian authorities concerned with Heard Island. After much correspondence and a visit to Canberra, guidelines were established to enable a private expedition to go and, finally, Permission in Principle was given and the call-sign VKØJS issued to me.

On September 4, 1982, H.I.DX.A. entered into a contract agreement with the Thorbryn Towing and Salvage Company, owners of the CHEYNES II, and a deposit of \$6,700 was paid, thus securing the vessel for an expedition to Heard Island. The vessel seemed ideal; an independent survey was done prior to our signing the contract. The contract for the expedition cost over \$1,000 in solicitor's fees. There were many attempts to discredit H.I.DX.A. and even IDXF (International DX Foundation) wasn't above interfering in our affairs. Telephone calls were being made to DX outlets (and publications-ed.) regarding the CHEYNES II. To my thinking, it was none of their business..

In chartering the CHEYNES II, H.I.DX.A. had widened its base considerably, since with berths for eighteen expeditioners the range of interests grew and became more than amateur radio. It must be remembered that H.I.DX.A. was formed solely to activate this rare DXCC country. There followed weeks of continual organization and writing and telephoning and finally our team was more or less finalized and our proposal to the government authorities accepted, with immediate permission for the amateur radio part, and a promise that the scientific objectives would be approved in due course.

On November 22 I left Norfolk Island to be at the scene of all the action, and prior to departure I really lost track of time, one thing after another all requiring attention. H.I.DX.A. put seventeen expeditioners on Heard Island...all logistics of food, shelter, power, first aid, and all the other things required were organized. (My wife) Kirsti and I formulated menus which were translated into cans, jars, and packets of this and that. Target was food for 28 people for eight weeks, and as things turned out we needed every bit of food we had.

The Sydney-Hobart yacht race increased our problems, as gradually all available wharf area was taken over by various groups awaiting the final outcome of the race. It became harder and harder to get things onto the CHEYNES II, and many heavy items had to be lugged for quite a long way to finally be put aboard. It was always a rush.



In Hobart-Loading the CHEYNES II

The final expedition makeup was now more or less complete, and final permission was given from Canberra and the Antarctic Division in Hobart for the expedition to go ahead. It should also be mentioned that Antarctic Division (Hobart) was very helpful in the loaning of tents and some equipment for use on Heard Island. In addition, H.I.DX.A. agreed to carry a large stock of emergency rations to be left on Heard Island for future use. Also, by arrangement with a well-known butane outlet, gas was carried to the island for use in cooking and heating equipments.

H.I.DX.A. provided everything except personal gear such as sleeping bags and clothing. Each expeditioner paid \$3,000 as his or her share and this was put towards chartering costs but not including fuel. The final number of expeditioners was seventeen; we had a few offers from people who wished to come for free, but it was felt that this was not a good idea. We were joined by a group of Austrian mountaineers set on climbing Heard Island's Big Ben. In due course I went to pick them up at the airport and I couldn't believe my eyes - the sheer volume of equipment they had brought was staggering. They came completely self-contained for their stay on Heard Island.

Amateur radio preparation was slightly easier. This is the DXpeditioner's bread and butter, and I find it relatively easy to put the amateur radio package together. Past field days and my own expeditions have been good teachers. However, it was important to not be caught short on Heard Island, and I am indebted to Walt Marshall, W7SE (who unfortunately had to drop out of the expedition); Walt arrived in Hobart early and he and I spent several days going through everything I had collected. All rigs were checked and complete station packages were made up. Many amateurs helped with the loan of gear, and all will be recognized in our documentary.

All antennas were pre-assembled as much as possible to minimize effort on Heard Island. Of course, we were lucky that the CHEYNES II is a big

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ship and the hold very large, so there were no problems with size or weight. All antennas had coaxial cable organized, all verticals had radials cut, and so on. This preparation stood us in good stead, and I must admit to a twinge of regret that Walt was not there to see the final results. For beam supports I used two-inch scaffold pole; this tubing is thick walled aluminum and is virtually unbendable!

Generators were a problem, as I wanted to put a minimum of two stations on the air and did not want to lose both stations if a generator failed. I opted for individual generators so that each station was independent of the others. This was a good arrangement I must thank Bob Walsh, WA8MOA, for his untiring efforts with the generators. I know we had problems but always seemed to have power. We had battery backup on each ICOM, and this allowed us to listen without bringing the generator up, and also to keep going during re-fueling. The generators required re-fueling at very short intervals, but it was better to stop and check every few hours than to run them into the ground, as we were utterly dependent on the generators.

Things gradually took shape at Hobart and all expedition positions were filled except for one... we could have taken more people for free but we wished for everyone to be "in" equally. This paid off as there was very little friction among team members, despite a great deal of hardship.



VK9NS and VK6MK Enroute at Albany

As most of you know, there was an extensive campaign to decry the efforts of H.I.DX.A., and it must be admitted that we were very small fry when confronted by IDXF. The intrusion in the affairs of H.I.DX.A. has been insidious and is still going on. It seems to me that they had enough trouble of their own without worrying about H.I.DX.A. The amount of sheer misrepresentation is available for all to read in the various publications.

At no time was the other effort (VKØHI/VKØCW) more than a "lift situation" to Heard Island... very little credit has been given to Bill Blunt and H.I.E., who convened the whole expedition for the other group. I know Bill was delighted that amateur radio should pay half of his charter, and in addition he only had to carry two hams instead of three.

We left Hobart approximately on schedule, to be met by storm conditions on clearing Tasmania. Force 8/9 winds had us in very rough seas, with 20-30 foot waves. The skipper made the decision to turn back for "shelter" but he eventually ended up in Hobart itself. After several days with no clear leadership from the skipper, owner Bob Barnett finally hired another skipper and we were on our way again. It was decided to steam the Northerly route for a couple of days to allow the new skipper to become acquainted with the CHEYNES II.

After three days, the new skipper abandoned the charter, saying that the vessel did not have the range. Fuel was being used at an inexplicably varying rate. We telephoned the owner and it was agreed that the vessel would recommence from Albany, cutting some 1000 nautical miles off the trip.

After setting out from Albany, we were three days from Heard Island when the skipper informed me that the vessel was short of water and that we would have to put into Kerguelen. This diversion to Kerguelen, while affording delightful treatment by the French there, cost us valuable fuel.



(l-r VK6VR, VK9NL, VK6YK, W7SE)

Finally, after taking on water...and I will not discuss the grounding of the CHEYNES II at Kerguelen, we were on our way with a short haul to Heard Island. We had it on radar for hours and finally at 4 a.m. we prepared to go ashore. Everyone had assigned tasks and all gear was ashore by noon. The mountaineers really helped with their muscle and we must thank Bruno, Leopold, Werner, and Walter for their efforts. Unfortunately, a decision was made to drop the mountaineers in Mechanics Bay (my basic concept was to keep everyone at Atlas Cove). We were to pay for this later on departure under severe storm conditions.

Al, VKØCW, and Dave, VKØHI (of the "other group") were already on the island and the rest of the afternoon was spent shuttling everything from the beach to the respective locations. There are three metal buildings on Heard Island and Al and Dave had one which is lined and heated. Our scientists and camera team, seven persons, occupied one and the rest of us occupied the other; our building was un-insulated and unheated, but at least was some shelter from the cold and windy conditions.



Cameramen Ron and Ray

Naturally, all attempts were made to get the stations on the air, and the scientists and film crew helped. Our first casualty was the Minooka special that Bob wanted to get operative. A combination of exhaustion, wind, and a lack of expertise saw the Minooka fold over and crash to the ground. A multiband vertical was hurriedly put up and we

were on the air! Here is the equipment run-down:

4-ICOM 701, 1-ICOM 720, 1-ICOM 740, 1-TS830,
1-FT901, 1-TH3MKIII, 1-3el 10 Meter beam, and
1-3el 15 Meter beam, plus 3-18AVQ verticals.

We took four 2.5 KVA petrol generators along with 1200 liters of fuel, and of course, hundreds of "bits and pieces." Holding up antennas was a problem since the top sand was only a few inches deep. We had to use Azerelia clumps and double or triple stakes to hold things up. No antennas were lost, even at the height of the storms.

Band conditions were poor but gradually the score crept up. The available (open) band was always shared with the other group. However, the two groups were about 400 meters apart so it was not a problem as far as we were concerned. The crying shame was propagation, as we could have operated three stations simultaneously. Our 10 Meter total of 150 contacts indicates how things were. We did accomplish several notable firsts: first YL (Kirsti, bless her cotton socks), first SSTV, first RTTY, and first Satellite. We were on 6 Meters, too, but nothing achieved on that band, I'm afraid.

Operating was difficult because it seemed impossible to keep warm. Glove on one hand, feet wrapped up, and so on. But we were there for you to work...endless CQing ensured that we opened the bands and we didn't quit until they were closed. Fourteen thousand contacts with 138 countries is well below what we wanted but nothing could be done about band conditions.

Until the last couple of days the weather had been kind, and a great deal of scientific work was done. Our mountaineers got within six hours of the summit of Big Ben, then sat waiting in wet clothes and soaking tents for the cold spell that would let them reach the top. Our film crew filmed everything that moved and many things that didn't. Our two-hour documentary is being released this month in Australia and later (we hope) internationally.

It was part of our contract that we could stay longer if we paid, but the weather prevented that. We had gradually, in the final days, moved gear to the beach for loading, but a major storm forced us to move much of it back away from the beach. We stayed one more night than intended. The next morning weather improved and we got aboard, but still had to pick up the mountaineers in Mechanics Bay. We left Atlas Cove after picking up Al and Dave and gear and putting them on Anaconda II. As we rounded the point out of Atlas Cove our dinghy "in tow" was swamped and sank. It was now that the Anaconda came to our aid in return for our efforts, and our mountaineers were uplifted by Bill Blunt's crew, using a couple of Zodiacs.

The Cheynes II was short of fuel but arrangements had been made with Bob Barnett to refuel and take on more water about 500 miles south of Albany. We sailed 855 nautical miles in 368 hours at an average speed of 2.32 knots. At one point we were going so slowly that a penguin walked aboard. Our penguin expert examined the animal and then sent it back overboard. We finally did get up steam once again and it was a nice feeling to be moving. The CHEYNES II is a terrific sea boat, very safe and low in the water.

Bob Barnett, in his infinite wisdom, did not leave as announced, and finally came to tow us in. He had fuel and water aboard but the seas were too rough to make the transfer! At this point he banned amateur radio for the duration of the tow... too much talking, he said. We will send him to

Albania...they ban amateur radio there, too!



Heard Island Welcoming Committee

Back home on Norfolk Island, we had time to consider the nastiness over the logs and the suggestion that they had been lost. It seems incredible to think that anyone should be so unethical as to suggest such a thing. We had the logs authenticated by VK6MK and an announcement made to that effect on the W.I.A. (Wireless Institute of Australia) broadcast the Sunday following our return. This was followed by an article in The DX Bulletin, and I am grateful to that publication for publishing all of the material sent by our detractors, the VK6 DX Chasers Club. It was strange that none of that group had any intention of going on their own expedition, even if their expenses had been paid for.

For myself, I apologize to the many who helped and then waited (through the delays). As a result of your assistance the following expeditioners were put ashore on Heard Island...not in our wildest dreams did we ever think that we would endure a long and arduous trip in the name of Amateur Radio.

Amateur Radio and Organization

James B. Smith, VK9NS, Leader and organizer
Kirsti Jenkins Smith, VK9NL, co-organizer
Sjoerd Jongens, VKØSJ, co-organizer
Robert Walsh, WA8MOA, operator
Walter Flor, OE1LO, operator
Walter Marshall, W7SE (withdrew at Albany)

Scientists

Prof. H. Heatwole, zoologist
Dr. Robert Jones, veterinary surgeon
Dr. Jeremy M.B. Smith, botanist
Dominique W. Ward, zoologist
Claire Speedie, ornithologist
Alison Green, geologist

Film Documentary

Raymond Sinclair, journalist
Ron Hurrell, cine cameraman

Mountaineers

Bruno Klausbruckner, engineer
Werner Holz1, mountaineer
Leopold Krenn, mountaineer
Peter Hardie, public servant

Finally, H.I.DX.A. replaced the automatic weather station for the Antarctic Division, recovered the auto weather station for the Dept. of Glaciology, took weather observations every four hours for the Dept. of Meteorology, and logged bird sightings, among other scientific activities.

CALENDAR

OSCAR 10 Phase IIIB successfully launched Jun 16;
listen to WIAW for bulletins

Bangladesh S2BTF is on SEANET but no prop to USA
China How to Work It: Issue 193
Chad DJ5RT/TT8 rumored on again soon
Tuvalu By GM4JAM for long stay soon; I 193
Taiwan BV2B Wednesdays, 14225 at 1500Z; I 193

Rodriguez 3B9FK Jun 15-Jul 15
Leichtenstain PAØGMM/HBØ Jun 19-22
Madeira G4JMB/CT3 by VS6CT, Jun/Jul
St Kitts Jun 17-Jul 4 by W8 group; I 192
DEADLINE TDXB Survey Sheets, extended to Jul 1

Fr St Martin FGØDDV/FS by NJDXA Jun 23-Jul 6; I 190
Mt Athos Rumored Jun 25; I 191
DEADLINE DXCC Honor Roll QSLs in Newington by Jun
St Maarten K2KTT/PJ7 Jul 5-12 30
St Pierre FPØ for Radiosport Jul 6-12; I 190

Corsica FØCH/FC by HB9TL Jul 6-26
Contest IARU Radiosport Jul 9/10
Market Reef Jul 22-Aug 1; I 189
Andorra C31YR by G8APZ Jul 16-24
Convention NW DX, Seattle, Jul 29-31

EARTH-SHAKING NEWS

If there were any this week, you can bet it would be here.
Next week we'll report on continuing efforts of the JAs
to get amateur radio started in Cambodia/Kampuchea.
Keep those Survey Sheets coming in, and thanks for renewing
your subscriptions promptly. Next issue: Monthly QSL List.

PROPAGATION

Jun 20, Disturbed; Jun 21, Below
Normal going to High Normal; Jun
22 -24, High Normal; Jun 25, 26,
Above Normal; Jun 27-29, High
Normal. TNX N4XX.

THANKS!

Several people made this special
Heard Island issue possible. Of
course, Jim Smith, VK9NS, a
gentleman and fine operator, also
turned out to be a writer. His
wife Kirsti, VK9NL, helped by
faithfully answering our letters
over the months. And Ron
Pretekin, AB8K, interviewed Jim
Smith at Dayton, wrote us a long
letter, and answered many ques-
tions we had. The thoughtfulness
and efforts of all three are
much appreciated!

FINAL NOTE

The Heard Island DX Association,
PO BOX 90, Norfolk Island, Aus-
tralia 2899, offers full member-
ships at \$25/year. And any do-
nation you'd like to make to help
defray the costs of the 1983
expedition would be appreciated.
H.I.DX.A. is currently looking
at Kermadec.

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