

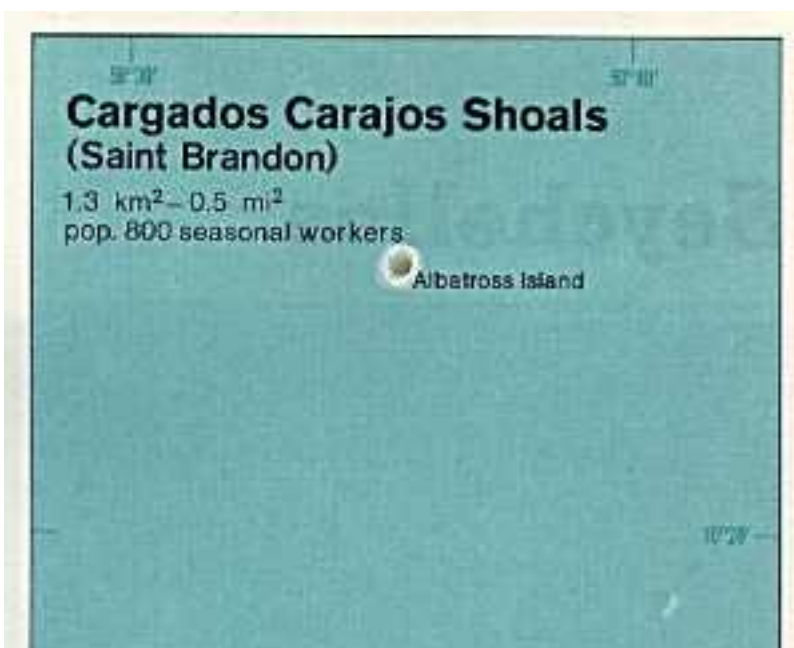
# With Don Miller VQ8CBB at St Brandon, 1967

by Larry Page, ex- WB2DHF, VQ8CH, VQ8CHR

In 1967 I found myself in Mahé, Seychelles after working my way from Europe as crewman on various yachts. There I met Jack Astley, skipper of the 30ft Piver trimaran *Edward Bear*. Jack and friends had built the yacht in Auckland, NZ, and had sailed by way of Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore & Maldives. Money was running low, others of the crew had left, and the voyage appeared to be in jeopardy. However, Jack told me of a prospect for further charter work for an American radio ham who wished to visit small Indian Ocean islands starting from Mauritius. So I joined *Edward Bear* and together we set off for the 13-day 980-mile upwind voyage South, arriving at Port Louis in late June to await our charterer.



Although I was myself also a ham, I had not heard of Dr Don Miller W9WNV. He arrived in early August accompanied by Bill Rindone WA6SBO, and I was introduced to the inside world of DXpeditions. At first sight Don appeared to be a personable roly-poly individual, but with an inner streak of extreme intensity. His organizational abilities became apparent when he cleared his huge inventory of equipment through Mauritius strict customs without getting caught for duty.



So it came to be that a grossly overloaded trimaran headed out into the trade winds for the island of Rodrigues. Our first problem was that our skipper Jack found that his left arm had become paralysed, to the extent that he was unable to help operate the boat. As we beat along the Mauritius shore I could see that Bill Rindone in his soaking wet bunk was beginning to wonder if the journey was going to be worthwhile, and he very wisely asked us to put him ashore on the Northwest corner of Mauritius. Don's determination to reach Rodrigues was undiminished, for he was



anxious that he should reach there before expected competition from a German radio ham aboard the catamaran *World Cat* due from the direction of Australia; he gave little credence to the seriousness of Jack's medical problem.

Back into the trades we beat, but after two or three days one of our two forestays broke, and the jib tore. After emergency repairs we gave up the attempt on Rodrigues, and fell off on a close reach to St Brandon, another island on Don's list. A couple of days of fraught navigation found us amongst the Cargados Carajos shoals, looking for tiny Raphael Island. Approaching from the West we anchored in sight of the fishing and meteorological stations. There at anchor was the fishing supply ship *m/v La Perle II*. Jack almost did himself in whilst getting into our dinghy, and since Doctor Don was unable offer a cure, a decision was made to send Jack back to Mauritius on the soon-to-depart *La Perle*.

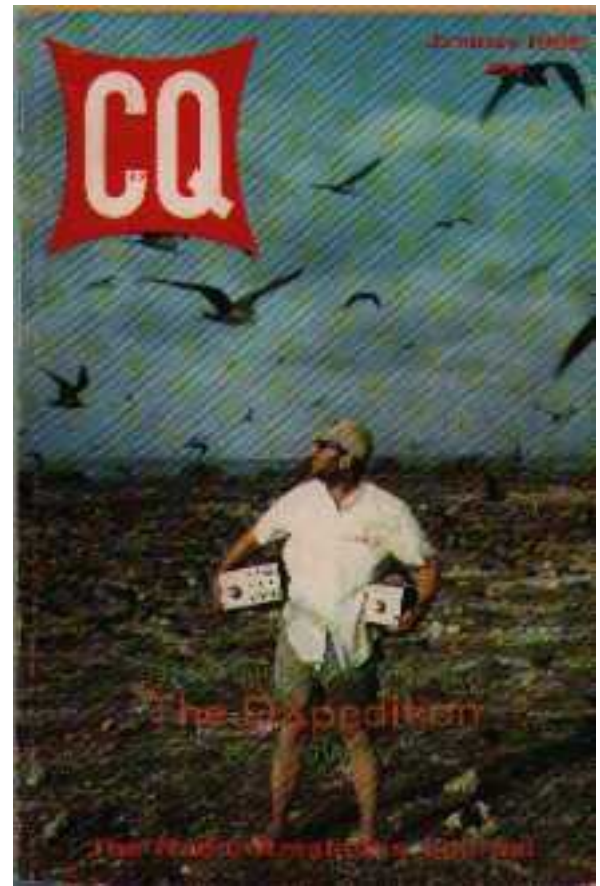
So it came to be that Don and I moved into the Raphael Island Fishing Company's guest shack along with two Collins S-lines complete with 30S-1 linears, Hy-Gain TH-3 tri-bander & Sears Roebuck generator. Also along on the trip was a Galaxy-V transceiver from one of Don's sponsors, but that was strictly for a photo-opportunity - the front cover of *CQ*<sup>1</sup> magazine.

31 years ago St Brandon was base for a line fishery from small boats manned by indentured Rodriguans & Seychellois living under very primitive conditions. An interesting facet of a

fisherman's life was that he was prevented from leaving the island if he was in debt to the company store. The meteorological observer (who was in radio contact with Mauritius) and the fishery manager were helpful and friendly, and I recall big fish-tasting omelettes made from seabird eggs from the islet breeding colony nearby.

Soon the operation was underway, making lots of contacts with hams who had missed the very limited previous VQ8BBB operation. Notable however were his contacts with Sonia PY2SO in which strange coded messages were exchanged. Over a period of about four days thousands of contacts were made, except of course with those on Don's NJDXA blacklist. For a ham who had never been rare DX, the experience of operating alongside the World's leading operator from one of the rarest places was mindboggling!

Cargados Carajos shoals cover a wide area in the shape of a crescent with breakers, and with tiny sand-spits, some of which have a little vegetation. Raphael has a few maritime pines and palms. In their tiny boats the fishermen venture up to twenty miles along the reef whilst line-fishing for reef and pelagic catches to be brought back for drying. At night I would walk around the tiny (approx 1km around at high tide) island talking with the fishermen using the little patois I had learned in the Seychelles. Some were living in palm-frond shelters, others in shacks. After a gale which threatened *Edward Bear* at anchor I discovered on the beach a purple murex shell which turned out to be a rarity, and which I later gave to a leading collector.



Finally after certain messages had been passed to Sonia we were ready to sail back to Mauritius. This was not going to be easy, because Don would have to do half the steering. Very welcome was the gift of a roast of beef on which Don and I lived for the two day passage.

Back in Mauritius we found Jack with Margie his Mauritian girlfriend well on his way to recovery and later marriage. His problem had been diagnosed as 'Saturday-night paralysis'- a psychosomatic reaction to being parted from a loved one!

<sup>1</sup> *CQ* magazine, January 1968

(The above was posted to *VE7TCP DX mailing list* May 10, 1998).

This account continues [With Don Miller VQ8CBR at Rodrigues, 1967](#)

Return to K2CD's [Look back at Don Miller W9WNV](#)



**VQ8CBB**      **1965-1967 DXpedition**      **St. Brandon**

OPERATORS: LARRY PAGE WB2DHF, VQ8CH  
DON MILLER W9WNV, VQ8CB

Equipment: **Galaxy** Mark V Line  
**Waters** Codax Keyer & Accessories  
**HyGain** Antennas  
**Electro-Voice** Microphones

Call	Date	GMT	MCS	Mode	R(S)T
R6E1D	8-24-67	1323	14	SSB	5-8

QSL: VIA KØTCF *Roy*

(Images fetched from the [W7HR QSL Gallery](#))