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**Gray Line Staff**

**KØAD  
KØIEA  
KØJUH  
WØBV**

# The GRAY LINE REPORT

***DXing from Minnesota - Land of 10,000 Lakes***

## FT5ZM

### The Amsterdam Island DXpedition

*by Ralph Fedor, KØIR - Team Leader*



#### The FT5ZM Team

Left to right: VA7DX, N2OO, VE7CT, UA3AB, K9CT, WB9Z, K4ZLE, N6HC, KØIR, K4UEE, FM5CD, LA6VM, EY8MM, HK1R

[The Amsterdam Island DXpedition](#) had its origin in 2012. I had my sights on a Heard Island DXpedition for 2014 with a core group of team members, a ship and a green light from the Australian Antarctic Division in place. I made no public announcement, since I had not finalized the finances. When another party announced their intent to activate Heard in 2014, I decided to re-focus on another project and selected Amsterdam Island. The cost of doing Amsterdam would be somewhat greater than the Heard project, and the logistics quite different, but the ship and

team would not need to change. In late May of 2012, I began working intently on the Amsterdam project.

Over the next 15 months, I spent over 2,000 hours on the project. There was a landing permit to secure, customs and shipping to coordinate, transportation to re-arrange, equipment to secure, a team roster to complete and contracts to negotiate. I worked with Stan, **SQ8X**, to create our website and I asked my good friend and fellow DXpeditioner, Bob, **K4UEE** to handle our finances. George, **N4GRN** helped with storage and shipping, while Gregg, **W6IZT** worked on our IT system. These four gentlemen made an enormous contribution to the project.

I found myself dealing with four currencies and governments: the United States, New Zealand, Australia and France. Fluctuations in the value of the U.S. dollar complicated our cost projections, and I struggled with translating correspondence into French to communicate with TAAF (Australes et Antarctiques Francaises), which administers Amsterdam Island, and ultimately issued me a landing permit and amateur radio license. The people at TAAF were very courteous and responsive, but I was always uncertain about us really understanding each other. Then, in September of 2013, a miracle happened.

New personnel rotate onto Amsterdam Island every September. I emailed the new Amsterdam base commander to brief him on our upcoming DXpedition, putting my email in English followed by Google Translate's French version. The base commander replied promptly saying that he had gone to school in Canada and had worked for two years in New Zealand, and that we could do this in English. He was interested in the DXpedition, and offered to help in any way that he could. The commander, Eric, was a godsend, and we worked through the final details of the DXpedition very smoothly. I briefed him on the weight and cubic meters of cargo we would bring with us, and he and I began organizing the logistics of getting it all ashore.

Meanwhile, a team of VK6 DXers offered to help us acquire hard to ship supplies, most notably, 30 light weight 10-ft. tower sections to support our 10 Yagi antennas. They also helped acquire medi-



The Braveheart loaded and ready to sail. Look closely to see the maritime mobile vertical on the starboard aft deck (see pg. 7).

cal supplies. The Braveheart sailed from New Zealand on December 26 loaded with the supplies we had shipped to them in October, and met our team in Fremantle, Australia on January 12<sup>th</sup>. We loaded the additional tower sections and medical supplies aboard the RV Braveheart in Fremantle, and our team of 14 began our sail to Amsterdam on January 15<sup>th</sup>. At first light, nine days later, we were looking at Amsterdam Island, and again, a little uncertainty crept into our minds. How would we be received by the 20 people there? Would we be viewed as intrusive and disruptive? Would they help us willingly or unwillingly? As the day brightened, those questions were answered in short order.



Arrival at Amsterdam Island with calm seas.



My jaw dropped a bit, as I saw a dozen or so people on the island making their way to the jetty which protruded into the open ocean. Following them were two four-wheel drive John Deere tractors, two flatbed trailers and a large Terex crane. When I climbed out of the zodiac and onto the jetty, I was met with smiles and handshakes, and the French team and our zodiac drivers began working together as a cohesive unit. It didn't take long to get our gear ashore and to feel welcome in this place.



Two four-wheel drive tractors, a Terex crane and two large trailers were used to offload the zodiac and move the DXpedition's gear to the op sites.



Tower sections being lifted ashore. These would support ten 3-element monoband Yagis.

Our equipment containers were all color coded, blue would go to the shelter near the Amsterdam base (the Mataf shelter) and red to the shelter 2.2 km southwest of the base (the Antonelli shelter).

We assembled in the Skua Café for a welcome luncheon and more handshakes and smiles. Afterwards, the two tractors, one with a fork lift and the two trailers made quick work of moving our generators, fuel and radio gear to the appropriate shelters, and we began assembling our stations and putting up antennas.



Team members coming ashore on Amsterdam.

We were able to deploy our equipment essentially as planned. We had to make some adjustments to deal with the size of the shelters and the rugged terrain for the antennas, but we were able to use everything that we had planned to use. The Braveheart crew helped us enormously, and the base personnel were always willing to lend a hand. But, we were in for a great deal of work. The walk to Antonelli was a winding uphill and downhill path rising 600 feet, and not a straight 2.2 km line between the two sites.

Grasses at Antonelli were chest high, making antenna placement, laying radials and running feed lines a real chore. It was common to see someone's head and shoulders suddenly disappear from view above the grass when he stepped into a hole or stumbled on a hidden rock. In a few moments, the man's head would poke out of the grass again, and he would resume his task. After the first day at Antonelli, Jerry, **WB9Z** summed it up by saying, "Nodir worked my rear end off!" That's not Jerry's exact quote. He described his anatomy somewhat more graphically.

Nodir was not shirking either; it took him five hours of trudging through the tall grass to pull 1000 feet of ladder line for a bidirectional Beverage. Despite the challenges, both the Antonelli and Mataf sites were operational within 36 hours, and the DXpe-



dition was on the air on all bands at 0914 UTC on January 26, with eight K3s, four KPA500s, four OM Power amps, ten monoband Yagis and seven verticals.



Main street of Base Martin de Vivies.

We knew we would not be able to travel between the Antonelli shelter and the base during the night. Operating shifts there were essentially 24 hours long. Walking there and back in the same day was not an efficient use of our time. The two bunks at Antonelli allowed us to catch some sleep during our 24-hour shift. What we did not know was that we would not be able to walk between our sleeping quarters at the base and the Mataf shelter at night. The walk was not long, but was hazardous at night because of the rough terrain and the fur seals that moved onto the path after nightfall. Therefore, shifts at Mataf ended up being 12 hours long. We were initially concerned about these 12- and 24-hour shifts, but we actually settled into this routine quite easily.



To welcome the FT5ZM team, the French displayed flags from all the team member's countries. During our stay on Amsterdam there were more nationalities on the island than ever before.

We went into this DXpedition expecting sunspot numbers in the mid-60s. We were treated with sunspot numbers in the mid-80s. This made 10 meters a fantastic band, yielding more QSOs than any other band. The long, phenomenal European openings produced over 84,000 QSOs. North Americans were rewarded with over 42,000 QSOs and Asia almost 38,000. I want to thank Stu, **K6TU** for his assistance with propagation predictions. He confirmed that our 3-element Yagis would have a 10 dB advantage over SVDA arrays. Thanks to Stu, we knew when openings should be occurring, and tried to be there. The Yagis really helped to select optimum paths. We heard well, and I think we were heard well. The Elecraft K3s and KPA500s worked great for us, and the OM Power amplifiers never blinked.



The Mataf shelter and operating site.



The Antonelli shelter and operating site, located 2.2 km from Mataf.



Our 160 meter operation is a story in itself, and whatever measure of success we may have enjoyed on 160 meters is largely due to two factors: Nodir, **EY8MM**, and DX Engineering. Nodir was tireless and relentless in his pursuit of excellence on 160. He was not satisfied with our initial 18-meter high transmitting antenna, and took it down the second day, converting it into a 28-meter high flame-thrower. Almost singlehandedly, he laid out the DX Engineering Beverages and DX Engineering Four-Square Receive Array. He knew and briefed everyone on propagation, and essentially set the table for the rest of us. We tried to be loud on 160, and benefited from multiple directional receive antennas and the band opening before sunset and remaining open until well after sunrise. We netted 3578 QSOs from our 160 site at Antonelli.



Our first 160 meter antenna was a top-loaded 18-meter tall push-up mast.



Our second 160 meter antenna was 28 meters tall and top loaded, and used every day, except the first.

Our team of DXpeditioners functioned as a unit. I could not have asked for a better fit of complementary skills, emotional stability, physical endurance and tolerance. A number of us had special duties, and all of us rotated through what the base personnel called “Petite Marie.” This involved assisting with the daily cleaning chores in the dining hall and recreation area – washing down the tables, vacuuming, dusting and assisting with serving. We were truly a part of the base team.

The base team, in turn, became a part of our team. We presented them with T-shirts celebrating their 65<sup>th</sup> mission on Amsterdam, gave them a 30-minute slide presentation about amateur radio and

held an “open house,” so they could get a close look at what we were doing. When we made our 100,000<sup>th</sup> QSO, they hung a large celebratory banner to mark the event, and repeated this for our 150,000<sup>th</sup> QSO. As a result, I think we have one new ham in the making, as a result.



The base personnel put up a banner celebrating our 100,000th QSO.

DXers and DXpeditioners perceive things differently. DXers hear what’s happening on the DXpedition’s transmit frequency. DXpeditioners hear what’s happening on their receive frequency. My perspective is this: Callers were generally courteous and orderly. If I struggled with a call, others generally stood by until I completed the QSO. I experienced no jamming on my receive frequency. If I called for a specific continent, I generally experienced cooperation. Of course there was an exception from time to time; perhaps just a simple mistake. So, in my personal experience, pileups were a pleasure to work ---- worldwide.



Operators at Antonelli.  
Left to right: **HK1R**, **K9CT**, **VA7DX**, **UA3AB**.



Time passed quickly for us, and soon it was time to leave. We began dismantling Antonelli on Feb. 11 and Metaf on Feb. 12, with deteriorating weather conditions. We essentially “made a run for it” on Feb. 13<sup>th</sup> with waves breaking over the jetty as we moved our equipment and the team from the island to the Braveheart. Nine days later, we were back in Australia with over 170,000 QSOs in our log.



The weather turned foul at our departure time with waves crashing over the jetty. Thanks to the skill of the Braveheart's zodiac operators and the French crane operators we all made it off the island safely.

There are so many to thank for our success. The Northern California DX Foundation tops the list with its \$50,000 of support. Then, there is IN-DEXA, the Colvin Grant and the hundreds of club and individual sponsors. The **Twin Cities DX Association** gave an extra measure of support, including a “pallet” of Coke products from **KØJUH**, and for that we thank them. Please visit our website and click on the [SPONSORS](#) tab to see a complete list of those who helped us. Also, note our commercial sponsors, and consider them for your next purchase.

Most of all, I need to thank the 13 men who joined me on this DXpedition – the team. Each of them invested a large amount of money, time and trust to produce those 170,000 QSOs. When you hear them on the air, tell them “Thank you.” They are the ones who made FT5ZM happen.

73! Ralph, KØIR



*Editor's note: All of the photos in the FT5ZM story were taken by Ralph, KØIR. The following Amsterdam DXpedition photos are courtesy of Nodir, EY8MM. Many more photos may be seen on Nodir's website: <http://www.ey8mm.com/pictures/view-album/61>*



Ready for departure from Freemantle.



Full speed ahead to Amsterdam.



The Braveheart's engine room.





VK6FZM/MM operator KØIR - using Elecraft KX3



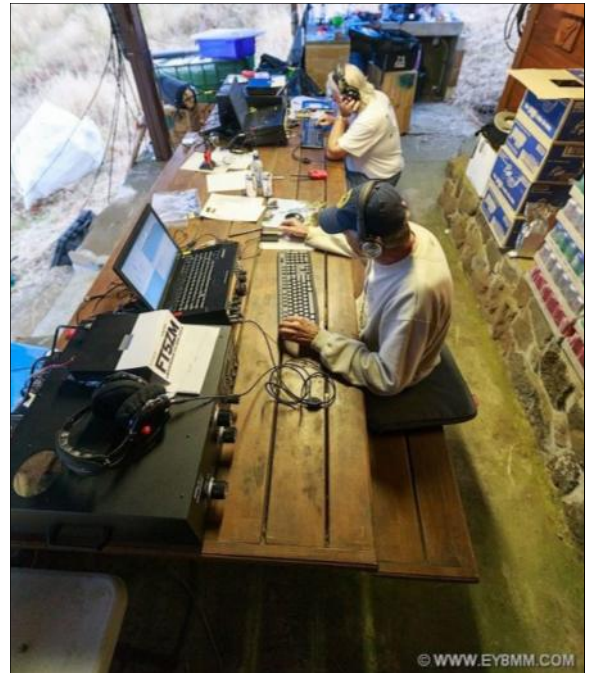
Over 50 zodiac trips bring the gear to shore.



Setup at the Mataf site.



Maritime mobile vertical.



Operating position outside of the Mataf shelter.  
Note the Coke products behind the operators.  
(supplied by KØJUH!)





Generators run in special housings to prevent any oil or gas spills.



Antennas at the Antonelli site.



The Antonelli site.



Bob, K4UEE



Craig, K9CT (left) runs 160 meters.  
Andy, UA3AB (right) runs 80 meters.



The Braveheart waiting to take us back home.

