

G4UZN Anthony Quest / N1CWH Tracey Sherry

Transcript of conversation via Linked In

3rd/4th February 2019

AQ: Are you the Tracey Sherry that was on Cocos Island in 1984 and used Ham Radio?

TS: One and the same! Still married to my partner in crime, Tom Sherry (who's at Tulane University these days).

AQ: Wow! I am an accountant (recently retired) in Leeds, England; my callsign is G4UZN. I am researching all the past radio operations from Cocos and came across your call. Can you tell me anything about what you were doing there (as a scientist) and anything about your radio activity?

TS: Send me your e-mail and I'll send you a copy of the research paper that resulted from it. My hubby and I lived and did research there for 9 and a half months spread out over a year (November '83 to October '84) on the only Darwin's Finch not on the Galapagos. My radio activity was primarily for logistical and emergency purposes, and to stay in touch with our families (via phone patch). We were lucky that someone before us had erected a tall tower that we were able to install a beam on and string a dipole antenna from (some days one worked better, some days the other). I've kept my license (N1CWH as you probably already know) current. but sadly haven't been near a radio since we left the island. It gets 7-8 metres of annual rainfall and was challenging to work there as a result. We lived in tents, and our Desnex foot fungus powder molded! One of these days we'll write a book about our time, work and experiences there.

I barely use Linked In. How did you track me down?

AQ: Well, I looked up N1CWH on www.qrz.com and found your full name and location. So I fed that into Google and came up with Birdfoot Festival. Getting closer. Your age on the FCC license was the same as on your Birdfoot profile, so it had to be you. Then I found a link to you on Linked In (which I joined myself years ago but never used). I just gave a thumbs-up to your husband's interview on YouTube. One in the morning here, so calling it a day.....

AQ: Hello again!! Can I ask you a couple of questions about Cocos and the radio thing?

TS: Sure.

AQ: Well, not a lot with the radio, but you must have been on the air a fair bit to get into the newsletters. Wonder what radio you used. There were some very well known Costa Rican ops there at the same time as you. You had a QSL Manager – Stewart Lardin Carse, in San Jose. You must have had QSL cards. What was the connection with him. My research is not in any way as important as yours has been..and Birdfoot Festival – an appropriate name.

TS: Stewart Carse was a good friend. What a character. We often stayed with him and his wife. We did have QSL cards. All my records (including my log book) are in New Orleans right now, and we're away for a bit. I can look for them when we get back. Newsletters? My radio was a Sony of some sort. I still have it and both antennas in our attic. I was on the air usually once a week (to check in, to order supplies, coordinate volunteers, food deliveries (once a month by boat) and occasionally otherwise as needed-I did handle three significant (two major) emergencies while out there.

Birdfoot Festival is named after the Birdfoot delta of the Mississippi River.

Getting my "portable TI9" was not easy and a long story. I'd have to dig back into our journals to get it right, but it took some wrangling.

One major (and very helpful) contact was a ham operator in Santiago, Chile, named Mickey? The bounce to Santiago was often perfect, and he'd phone patch us in all over the place as needed. Total sweetheart.

I don't remember how we initially connected with Stewart Carse, but I'll bet we wrote about it in our journals.

AQ: You have given me an immense amount of useful information!! I'm curious about your license, because the ham radio newsletters at the time said you weren't properly licensed so "didn't count". I collect old QSL cards for history research etc, and have many from Cocos and CR. Maybe one of yours will turn up some time. I'm off the air myself at the moment – we moved to a smaller house last year plus it is the bottom of the sunspot cycle, so not missing anything.

TS: The hell I wasn't licensed.

My recollection is that I didn't have the official "TI9" from the very beginning of our time out there, but I don't think it took us long to get it. I'll have to look back in those journals.

I recall also that a large group of DX'ers (is that the proper term?) came out to Cocos for a day while we were there and did some transmitting. Again, would have to check the journals.

Our daughter lives in London, btw. What kind of accounting did you specialize in before you retired?

I probably should not have sent this to you for copyright reasons. Please do not share it with others w/o proper attribution. I took it from a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter in 1984.

Here's a photo (overview of Bahia Wafer) of the tower with my beam (and someone else's..... probably belonging to a Costa Rican ham radio club) on it. I'm not sure you can see the dipole antenna. The tin shacks belonged to the Costa Rica Guardia Nacional. The little shack is the outhouse. The beach is immediately to the left (you can see a tad of it in the upper left-hand corner). I believe that all of these shacks are now gone. Our research group lived in four large tents.

Again, I took that photo from the same U.S. Guard helicopter. One morning, a very large U.S. Coast Guard cutter appeared on the horizon and after a while (at low tide) a helicopter touched down on the beach. It became clear pretty quickly that they were checking for illegal drug activity. Once they realized that we were legit (if insane to be working there) they offered us a flight around the island (simply unforgettable) and later returned with a huge care package of COLD BEER, fresh fruit. And a can of those horrid (at the time they were a fabulous treat) Pringles (faux potato chips) among other treats.

N1CWH/TI9 Update from Thomas Sherry 5th Feb 2019

TS: Hi Anthony, I can't do this now, but can do so when I get back to New Orleans in mid-March. I could put together a detailed account of our Ham Radio experiences and adventures while working on Cocos Island. I have detailed, day-by-day notes, so all the details you could want. We are thinking that this would make a nice juicy chapter for our book. At any rate, as I recollect, here's what happened. Initially we applied to Costa Rican govt. office and received license to broadcast from Cocos Island (TI9, as I recall). When we got out there, Tracy started connecting with various people who came through with clear signals. We communicated with Stuart Carse, in Escazu, Costa Rica (a retired U.S. expatriate, who took us under his wing). E.g., with food lists for the Organization for Tropical Studies to purchase for us and put on the boat in Puntarenas about once a month to re-

provision us. We wanted to maintain a bunch of ham radio contacts so that if we had an emergency we could get help quickly-which actually happened, but that's another story.

One of the contacts was "Santiago Mickey", who came in loud and clear every evening and was kind of watching over us metaphorically. At some point he asked us if we could do some QSL cards for buddies, and we ended up doing some. Not a large number, maybe dozens, but I can't recall. At any rate the Costa Rican ham radio enthusiasts got wind of this and felt threatened. We believe it was because our doing QSLs cut into their profit (people would send them a request with a \$1.00 bill. And the cost of postage was way less, so they profited from every QSL they did. They'd come out to Cocos a few times a year for several days, and basically do ham radio contacts continuously, and they'd advertise when they'd be out there so people would line up to get these rare T19 confirmations.

The Costa Rican ham radio people basically black-balled us, published in ham radio magazines that we were doing contacts illegally, and basically "demoted" us from T19 to T18, so, yes, it was confusing, and we were pretty pissed off about this because we didn't want there to be any confusion about where we were in an emergency. This is what I recall after decades...my journal entries will probably clarify some of this.