

# R S G B



## BULLETIN

FEBRUARY 1964

VOL. 40, No. 2



KURIA MURIA

JOURNAL OF THE RADIO SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

# The 1963 Royal Air Force Amateur Radio Society Expedition to the Kurja Muria Islands

By Flight Lieutenant J. M. Hern, RAF, VS9AAA\*

IN October, 1961, the Royal Air Force Amateur Radio Society mounted an amateur radio expedition to the island of Kamaran in the Red Sea. This proved so successful that it was decided to try and organize an official RAFARS expedition every year. As Kamaran was a new country for DXCC purposes, it was also decided to try and make the next expedition another new country if one could be found. This proved to be rather a difficult proposition. After several different possibilities had been suggested and discarded for a variety of reasons, the islands of Kurja Muria were selected. Unfortunately, the plans to launch the 1962 expedition to the Kurja Muria islands failed at an advanced stage, which meant that there was no 1962 RAFARS expedition. The following documentary outlines the problems met and overcome, and describes the results of the 1963 expedition.

The islands of Kurja Muria are shown on the Admiralty chart as being 17° 32' N, and 56° 05' E. The chart is annotated with additional information that the islands may be 2½ miles from their shown position. There are four islands in the group, the main one being Hallaniya. This island is the largest, and is about 8½ miles long by 4½ miles wide. It is the only inhabited island. Sheikh Said Bin Muhammad rules over a total population of about 60 British subjects. The islands were ceded to Queen Victoria in 1854 by the Sultan of Muscat and Oman. They are mainly composed of limestone and granite and there is practically no vegetation. The main life on the island seemed to be crabs and flies with numerous large and small fish just off the island. The local fisherman caught, in fact, a manta ray about 12 ft. across just off shore from the bathing beach, and one of the operators nearly shot a shark with a speargun by mistake.

The principal problem was to get on to the island with all the supplies, remain there, and get off again. The island can only be approached safely between September and April, and, furthermore, although the chart showed two wells on the island, water still had to be carried. The beach was likely to have surf at times, and therefore all technical equipment had to be packed and waterproofed. At first, the plan had been to charter a dhow from Masirah (VS9O), but there was the problem that with the state of the wind and tide, it would take many weeks to return without a motor. Although we could have been landed downwind at Salalah (both Masirah and Salalah are airfields), the total charter time of the dhow would mean an outlay of £1,000. A further complication was the time that each operator could be away from work. If chartering the dhow was possible, then the plan was to fly six persons to Masirah from Aden. Apart from the operators there would also have to be a fluent Arabic interpreter. It was felt that the time element was too great, and consequently further ways of getting to the islands were explored. It was finally decided to approach the local shipping company which was known to have a boat that sailed monthly to and from Masirah. It was slow travelling against the tide, but fairly fast on the return journey. For the sum of £100, we were given permission to go on the boat, provided we did our own cooking. It was then possible to take a supporting



VS9AAA operating the Collins s.s.b. equipment.  
(Photo by VS9AAA)

party in order to utilize to the full the operators and equipment. The party then consisted of 12 members, including a doctor.

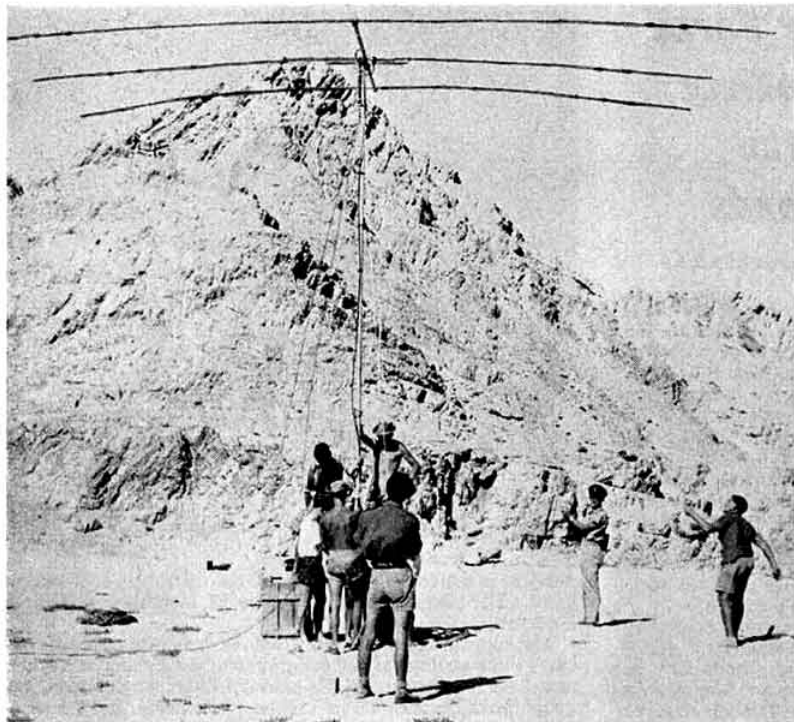
The supporting party comprised two separate units, one to carry out a geological and geographical survey, and the other as a base support group. Squadron Leader A. Silvester, the geographical expert, was in charge of the party, and the plan was to try and chart the salient points of the island. The supporting party meant a large increase in the amount of basic equipment necessary to ensure survival.

The equipment required for the task was slowly gathered together in Aden. The shipping company had told us that the M.V. *Seiyun* would leave Aden on or about November 2, 1963, and on November 9 we were asked to load the boat with equipment. This required three loads of a 3 ton lorry and much hard work. At the end of November 9 all the gear was on the deck of the boat. It remained there that night and on the afternoon of November 10 the whole party embarked for the first stage of the expedition.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, much work was going on. Permission had to be obtained through the political adviser in Bahrain to land on the island. Permission had already been obtained from the Postmaster General in Aden to operate on the island. As VS9K had already been issued for Kamaran VS9H was suggested for Hallaniyah and duly authorized. Radio links on service channels had to be arranged, and Royal Air Force flights already scheduled to pass near the islands on their way to Masirah were re-routed slightly in order to pass over the main island. Finally, the estimated time of arrival and commencement of operations had to be passed over the air from Aden to as many DX operators as possible. Special permission had been obtained from the Postmaster General in Aden for Gus M. Browning, W4BPD, to operate from the Kurja Muria and also Aden if he used my call-sign when I was there. Gus flew down from Afghanistan via India in time to join the party on October 25. He did, of course, stay longer in Aden than calculated but managed to keep VS9AAA very active on the band. I did not get on the air at all during that time as I was very busy making the final arrangements in Aden. Ken Smethurst arrived from Kenya also on the 25th, and passed the time in Aden by fishing. Ross Kelly was already in Aden with his own call VS9ARK.

After six and a half days of leisurely cruising up from Aden, the M.V. *Seiyun* approached the island of Halliniyah

\* 114 MU, BFPO 69.



Erecting the Mosley multiband aerial.

(Photo by VS9AAA)

just before mid-day on November 16. To pass the time on the way, several members of the party carried out practice in sextant work, and the radio party, less Gus, started up a bridge school. Bridge for 12 hours a day certainly kept us occupied! Most of the party slept out on the deck amongst crates of oranges, drums of aviation fuel and other sundry items. The ship's complement was completed with the addition of one dog and two pigeons.

Unloading our equipment into a pitching ship's boat took about four years off the lives of the owners of the radio equipment. All went well, however, and after five trips all equipment and expedition members were safely on the island, even if a little soaked in sea water. There were then four hours remaining until darkness. The first job was to ensure that the local population were certain that we were not going to invade them or to attack their village. As only the Sheikh spoke Arabic, our interpreter was kept fully occupied. The tents then went up on the sites selected and the radio equipment was set up. Before leaving Aden a considerable amount of thought had gone into the aerials required, and also to their positioning. Seventy per cent of the active radio world could be contacted, either by short or long path, via the north west. We also had to have an aerial for Masirah, plus, of course, a system that would create as little QRM as possible between the two stations. We originally had planned for three stations but the third generator failed to materialize at the last moment.

We were on a small beach with cliffs on all sides. The aerials used were as follows: On the north east side was a Mosley TA33JR beamed north west and fixed at a height of 30 ft. Running parallel to the beach to another 30 ft. mast was a Hy-Gain 20 and 40m trap dipole. The co-axial feed to this had been cut to a length of 109 ft., so it also worked very

well indeed on 20m, in the directions the beam did not cover. These two aerials were fed to a co-axial switch and then went to the KWM 2. To the south west of the operating tent was a small valley, and in this were placed two Hy-Gain 14 AVS verticals for 40/20/15/10m. These were fed in phase by very carefully measured 50 and 75 ohm co-axial links, and acted as a Hy-Gain vertical beam on all bands used. We were unable to switch the phasing so it was beamed to the south east. The wisdom of this was soon proved when the band was open to the States. The transmitter on the vertical aerial was working a W6 pile up and no east coast stations, whilst the transmitter on the beam was working the east but not the west coast, both these being on 20m. The operators kept a two hour watch for the first 48 hours, in order to analyze the conditions. After that it was finalized into three-hour watches, with the midnight to 3 and 3 to 6 a.m. local watch being combined. The operators were then able to snatch at least six hours sleep every 48 hours. It proved impossible to sleep during the day owing to the flies and the heat. Lessons learnt on the 1961 expedition were remembered and the two stations were operating 24 hours a day for a period of eight days. To persons listening to a VS9H calling CQ and not receiving a reply this may have seemed pointless. However, we went there to give a new country to as many

as possible. If in fact we made 10 QSOs in four hours on a nearly dead band—well, that was what we went there for. Actually, some of the rarer countries contacted came in during the quiet hours.

Conditions on the bands were relatively poor, and few massive pile-ups were encountered. The European s.s.b. net on 3.798 Mc/s will probably be surprised to know that on our last night, November 23, they were 59 in VS9H, but were working Ws and not listening on their own frequencies. With 600 watts of s.s.b. to the dipole, one station only was worked on 80m s.s.b. That was DL11N, a very good DXer indeed. The CQ DX contest in our last weekend was very useful and our number of contacts per hour went up. Unfortunately, on the Sunday at about 09.00 I saw a boat on the horizon. It proved to be the *Seiyun*, so we went off the air in a hurry!

Needless to say the camp was struck very rapidly indeed. The radio equipment was packed and then the fun began. A large sea was running and the ship's boat kept about ten yards off shore in a depth of water that alternated between four and nine feet deep! At least one box was lost in the sea and most of the others were completely soaked. The cases containing the two Collins stations were carried out on four shoulders. The weight of each of the two boxes was about 120 lb. I am 5 ft. 8 in. tall and was in front of one case just before it was put into the boat. The water completely covered my head and rose halfway up the box. When the box fell off our shoulders into the boat I came up swimming! Finally, all the gear was aboard and we started on our trip home. Everybody was exhausted but happy after a good expedition.

(Continued on page 100)



minimum in 1964, no real improvement is likely even in the summer.

No reports have been received for 28 Mc/s, and it is unlikely that anything will be heard before next summer.

### DX Briefs

**Norfolk Island** is the destination of G3PJN, R. Hattersley, who hopes, in due course, to be active from this dxotic spot.

**ZL4JF** on Campbell Island is active and searches for DX QSOs during the period 06.00 to 08.00 on 7 and 14 Mc/s. (VK4SS).

**W9TSS**, Bus Howell, of East Alton, Illinois, is active on the 28, 21 and 14 Mc/s bands with 150 watts, and would appreciate contacts with UK stations particularly those with an interest in recording.

The following stations will be active on **Jan Mayen Island** during the coming year: LA5, 1LG, 4WH, 7IH, 9GI, 9MI and 9PI, all operating/P. (LASHE).

**CR8AD** in Dili was worked by G2FFO on 14,045 kc/s c.w. at 13.20, the outgoing report being RST559. The QSL address will be found in *QTH Corner*.

**UA1KED** on Franz Josef Land is active on most days on 14 Mc/s c.w., the favourite frequencies being '040 and '060 kc/s. QSLs should be routed to RAEM.

Three new stations active from **Laos** on s.s.b. are XW8s AF, AU and AV.

Since returning to his former African haunts, **ZD6PBD** (formerly G3PBD) has contacted 100 countries in the first five weeks of operation, using a KW Electronics KW2000 and wire aeriels, usually of the dipole variety. (G2HFD).

**ZB2A**, the RAF club station on Gibraltar, is now again active following a rebuild, and is running 100 watts to a long wire aerial, and has been well heard on 21 Mc/s. (G2HFD).

**VS1MB** is active almost daily on s.s.b. using KW Electronics equipment, the usual hours being between 11.30 and 15.00. QSLs should go to K7GCM.

Correspondents are thanked for their co-operation in providing news items and reports, and acknowledgement is made to the *West Gulf DX Club Bulletin* (W51GJ), the *LIDXA Bulletin* (W2MES), *DX'press* (PA0FX), the *Florida DX Report* (K41IF) and the *DX'er* (WA6TGY). Please send all items to RSGB Headquarters to arrive not later than **February 7** for the **March** issue and **March 11** for the **April** issue.

### The European Band Plan

The plan, which is voluntary and supported by all IARU Societies in Europe, is as follows:

Frequency Band Mc/s	Type of Emission
3.5 — 3.6	c.w. only
3.6 — 3.8	phone only
7.0 — 7.05	c.w. only
7.05 — 7.1	c.w. and phone
14.0 — 14.1	c.w. only
14.1 — 14.11	RTTY and c.w.
14.11 — 14.35	c.w. and phone
21.0 — 21.15	c.w. only
21.15 — 21.45	c.w. and phone
28.0 — 28.2	c.w. only
28.2 — 29.7	c.w. and phone

### Kuria Muria Expedition (Continued from page 94)

The equipment worked as well as expected, with two exceptions. The 32S3 blew up a bias electrolytic capacitor and we were off the air for about 40 minutes in the midst of two very big pile-ups. One generator shorted a primary turn and this kept us off the air for about 30 minutes. I was on at the time and I hope that the F station I was working got his report. We had one bad sandstorm on our last night and a terrific rainstorm. This was useful as we completely replenished our dwindling water supplies from a local waterfall but about half an hour later there was no trace of water.

Details of the complete stations are as follows:

**Station A:** Transmissions were mainly on s.s.b., except that during periods when s.s.b. stations were not on the air, c.w. was used. The equipment comprised a KWM2, TA33JR, Trap Dipole, and a 500 watt generator. VS9HAA (John) and VS9HRK (Ross) were the operators.

**Station B:** Transmissions were mainly on c.w. with occasional s.s.b. The equipment comprised a 32S3, 75S3, two 14AVS vertical aeriels and a 500 watt generator. The operators were VS9HAA (Gus) and VQ4IN/VS9H (Ken). The results, as totals per band per mode are as follows:

band	80m	40m	20m	15m	10m	totals
c.w.	87	496	2337	1005	6	3931
s.s.b.	7	11	1256	45	6	1325
	94	507	3593	1050	12	5256

The number of different countries worked totalled 131, with one operator having worked over 100 countries.

The daily total of QSOs shown below make interesting reading when it is remembered that a c.w. sweepstake was on during the first weekend, and also the CQ C.W.—DX Contest, but c.w. conditions were not as good as expected.

Date (November) (6 hours)	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24 (12 hours)
c.w./s.s.b.	388	798	588	615	693	667	488	756	263

We should finally like to offer our sincere thanks to those who helped to make the trip so successful, namely; Squadron Leader Silvester and his party who gave much practical assistance; the World Wide Propagation Study Association; the Shell Oil Co. Ltd. who supplied 175 gallons of petrol for the generators; Mosley Electronics who solved a complicated problem in relation to trap aeriels; and to the many others who did so much to help.

### Theft of Police Radio Equipment

A quantity of radio equipment was recently stolen from a Home Office Radio Station near Folkestone. The Superintendent of Police thinks that the equipment may be offered for sale and has asked that the following details be published: Pye PTC703 receiver, PTC353 r.f. unit, PTC357 power unit, link receiver, and selective tone receiver. These units are all rack mounting. In addition there was a cardboard box containing 73 valves and some fuses.

Should any of the above equipment come to light, members are asked to contact the nearest Police Station or the Superintendent of Police, Folkestone, Kent.