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A VISIT TO COCO'S ISLAND

BY ALFONSO ESQUIVEL-LANG,
T19AEL

A group of Costa-Rican amateur radio operators had great interest in visiting Coco's Island to transmit from this location with the call-sign prefix T19 and to make the maximum possible number of radio contacts. This interest was based on the fact that Coco's Island, which is uninhabited from the radio point of view, is considered as a new country for ARRL DXCC credit. Many amateur-radio operators throughout the world wish to obtain a T19 QSL card for their DX record.

Planning the trip

The DX expedition to Coco's

Island began with plans in March, 1977. At the beginning the group was quite numerous. But some of the amateurs, for different reasons, decided not to make the trip, and at the end only three were ready to go to the island: T12CF, T12JVA, and myself, T12AEL.

Since Holy Week was approaching, businessmen from Puntarenas and San Jose had planned for various fishing vessels, as well as a yacht which offered a special excursion service for the entire Holy-Week holidays, to go to the island. In one of the fishing vessels, named *El Audaz*, was a group of fourteen of my fellow members of the "German 66 Sporting Club," which makes such a trip every year. This club

is affiliated with the German Club of Costa Rica, as well as others throughout Central America, with whom we are always in contact. Consequently, there were some members from Guatemala and Nicaragua.

On Friday, April 1, one day before leaving, the three amateur radio operators got together to solve last-minute details and coordinate our efforts with the person who organized the excursion trip in the city of Puntarenas. Our surprise was quite great when we were told that it was impossible to make the trip because, of all the persons that were originally supposed to go on the excursion, only six were left. Together with us this



Author TI9AEL and the vertical antenna, which had been mounted on the frame of an old army cot salvaged from the beach.

number amounted only to nine, which wasn't enough to charter the yacht.

I immediately contacted my friends of the Sporting Club, who told me that *El Audaz* was full but could take one more person.

On Saturday afternoon, we got together again to finish details of my trip, since I was to be the only amateur radio operator going to the island. The rest of my friends from the "German 66 Sporting Club" would be dedicated to skin diving and fishing, a hobby which they had been practicing a long time and is the reason they go to the island every year, since Coco's Island is a real sportsman's paradise.

The two hams staying behind (TI2CF and TI2JVA) obtained a small electrical plant from TI2NA, and I took my Drake TR4 transceiver, a Hustler 4BTV vertical antenna, gasoline, cables, and personal items. Around four in the afternoon I left for Puntarenas. The rest of my friends were waiting for me.

I had left all my luggage and equipment in the ship. We went to dinner, then I left my car in one of the parking places to be cared for during the week I'd be out of the country.

We went back to the ship and about midnight we left the Moreno Dock, very close to the estuary, heading toward the island at 11 knots.

Under way at last

The trip in general was very good with a relatively quiet sea and without any problems finding the island. Normally, Coco's Island is quite foggy and if the captain doesn't know the route very well, he can pass close and not see it.

Upon arrival at Chatham Bay we found four of my friends of the Club who had left a day earlier in a small sailing boat. On Monday, they took out a couple of the small boats with outboard motors to make a tour around the island and around Wafer Bay (see map on our QSL card).

At night we fished from the ship's deck. Within a few hours we landed 32 sharks. The island has a river with several ponds where one can swim. The island is covered by virgin jungle, which makes it very hard to cross by foot, but in the river one can travel long distances and arrive at beautiful ponds and falls. The

A Brief Note for New DXers

If you've scanned the official "countries list" for DXCC credits published by the ARRL, you'll notice two separate "countries" designated "Cocos Islands." One such country-credit is the Cocos (or Keeling) islands, which are in the Indian Ocean and are administered by Australia. The other Cocos Island belongs to the Central-American country of Costa Rica, and it is officially designated (in Costa Rica) as Isla del Coco. It is popularly known as "Coco's Island" in Central America. Isla del Coco, which has the amateur-radio call-sign prefix of TI9, is about 570 km (354 miles) southwest of Puntarenas, Costa Rica.

Editor



Author TI9AEL and his radio station. The power supply was mounted in a nearby tree. Not a very comfortable shack, but who cares?

island is occupied by deer, pigs, goats, chickens, and some cats.

Getting on the air

Wednesday was the day to begin making my radio contacts. In the morning my friends took me to Chatham Bay, where the boat was anchored, and I began assembling the equipment. I brought along a very large pipe to bury in the sand for the antenna (when the tide comes in, it covers the beach completely). I tried to plant the pipe in the highest part of the beach but couldn't because of the large quantity of rocks. A few meters from that location I found an old cot that someone had left. I brought the cot to the beach and installed my antenna onto one of the cot frames, placing stones on the cot to stabilize it. This was my antenna mount.

I placed the electrical plant in an old tree. The radio equipment and a small lamp that I used during the night was placed over an old gasoline drum to which a small wooden piece had been installed. Several hours later I began transmitting. It was near 1050 local time (1650 UTC).

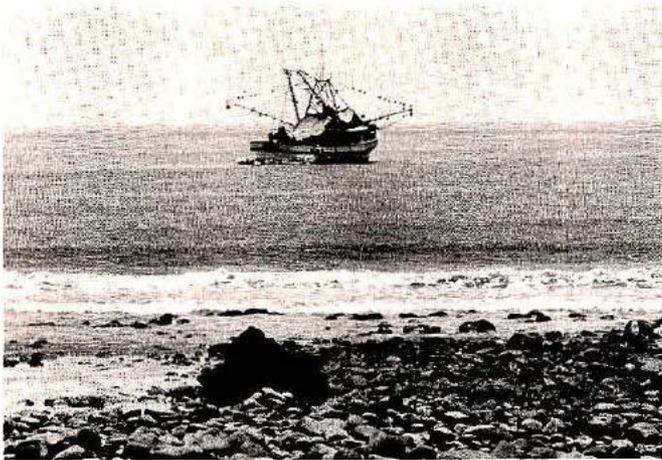
My first contact was made with HC1AZ, Esteban, in Quito, Ecuador. After some time, due



On the beach at Coco's Island showing some of the friends who made the trip.



Looking seaward from Puntarenas.



Our ship, *El Audaz*, anchored in Chatham Bay at Coco's Island off Costa Rica.

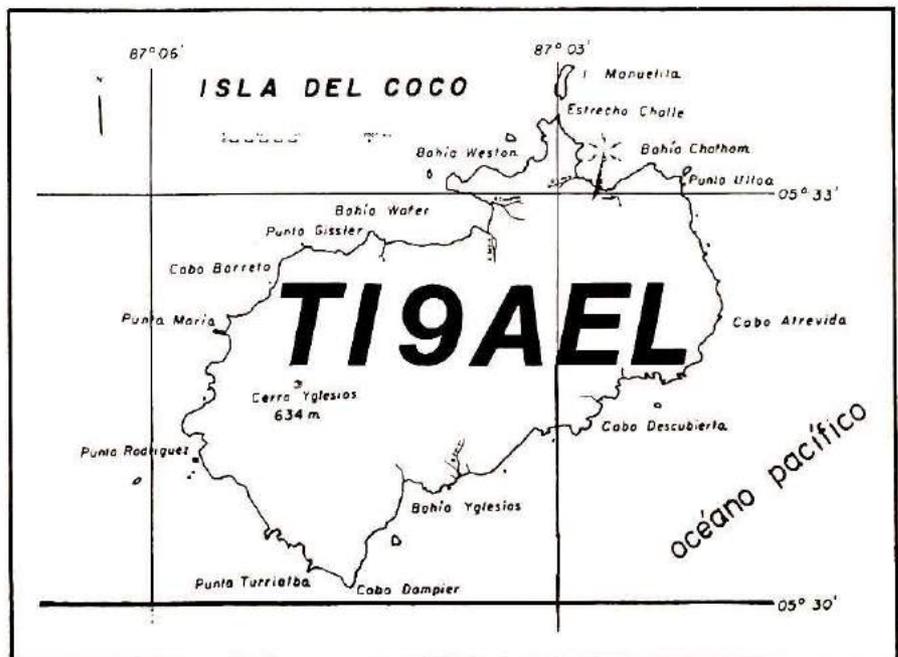


View of the beach at Chatham Bay. Lots of rocks made it difficult to erect an antenna.

to very poor conditions, I worked a Costa-Rican station, my friend Elias, T12EPG. Our Ecuadorian friend relayed, and we were able to pass a few messages. That day I made very few contacts; conditions for Costa Rica were poor and it started raining quite early. The equipment was almost without any protection, covered only by the shadows of a few almond trees.

When it began to rain I turned off the equipment and covered everything with plastic bags until the rain, which lasted several hours, was gone. Since this was my first trip to the island I wasn't prepared for the inclemencies of weather.

Early in the evening some friends came by in a boat, picked me up, and took me



The QSL card for T19AEL, which shows the island's geometry. Do you have one?

back to *El Audaz*, where a very good dinner had been prepared, complete with liquid refreshment. The boat's cook had prepared local fish and lobsters.

On Thursday, April 7, I arrived at the ham location and removed the plastic bags that

The sea was rough and the small boat took on a lot of water which wet much of the equipment, antenna, and papers (luckily, the log wasn't spoiled). Aboard the yacht I washed part of the equipment to avoid corrosion. We were hoisted aboard *El Audaz* at



Chatham Bay on Coco's Island. Our ship, *El Audaz*, is at the left. The sailboat, right, brought some friends from the "German 66 Sporting Club" of Costa Rica, who were interested in skin diving but who helped during the ham adventure.

covered the equipment. At 1830 UTC I began transmitting again, sitting as always over a rock covered with a towel (the softest seat I could find). One of the first contacts was with Jose Antonio, YN5JAR, a Nicaraguan surgeon living in Costa Rica. Also, Fernando, TI2FAG, greeted me. Fernando had been to the island with a group of Swiss amateurs, but this was his first contact with the island.

At 2240 UTC I received a call from TI2CF, Carlos Fonseca, one of the amateurs who couldn't come and who had promised help from Costa Rica with contact lists. That day I made many contacts with America and Europe with Carlos's help and from other amateurs in El Salvador, Guatemala, the United States, and Canada. Saturday was the last day, and I transmitted until 1300 local time after which my equipment and I were picked up in a small boat for the trip to *El Audaz*.

1700 local time. We weighed anchor from Chatham Bay then took a complete turn around the island. Coco's Island has several bays and beautiful beaches, but most of the coastal area consists of rocks forming a wall around the island. The two most-visited bays are Chatham and Wafer. Iglesias Bay has a beach with coconut trees and a beautiful waterfall. At 1800 local time we headed straight toward Puntarenas. We had excellent weather and favorable wind, which made the return trip possible in 28 hours, although the entrance at Nicoya Gulf was quite rough. A north wind had created great waves, which engulfed our ship.

We arrived home at 2200 local time. Some of the people in the group returned to San Jose during the same evening. The remaining friends stayed in Puntarenas to return home on the following day after some deserved rest. It was, indeed, a great experience. **HRH**

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