

VU7MS

KAVARATTI IS. DXPEDITION
IOTA AS-011 VU2CPL & VU3NXI



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KAVARATTI ISLAND AS-011

During our IOTA operations from Pamban, Rameshwaram AT5P, the natural question which popped up during our discussions was "where to next?". San A45WH & Kiran VU2XE suggested a VU4 or VU7 expedition. This became the spark which later ignited in my mind and became the Kavarratti Is Dxpediton VU7MS.

Although I am licensed from 1993, I never got an opportunity to operate on a regular basis due to work and other antenna restrictions. Once I settled into a new home where I had enough space to put up decent antennas, I could come back to the hobby. All big expeditions which happened during 2015/16 were good experience of how expeditions operate and after working many of them, I felt we should also contribute something to the community in the form of a expedition. Dxpeditons were always a fascinating aspect of this hobby and I was always thrilled to see different expedition videos on web. As a start, I joined San and Kiran for Rameshwaram expedition and it was an eye opener as to the extend of planning and resources required and the last minute unexpected "dossras" which will be thrown at you.

Lakshadweep Is. always held a very special place in my heart since I have many close friends from the island and I have enjoyed their hospitality before as a visitor. A visit to the island was planned since I had some free time in Nov-Dec 2016. I had mentioned my plan to a very few close friends. Most were tied up with work and other personal commitments. Sidhu VU3NXI, when i mentioned my plan, was immediately interested in the trip. We were clear that operations will not happen, but will try for a permit and if it comes, then we can think of operating from the island. The documentation was done and we were lucky to get all clearances in time (Thanks to lots of good will from many). Sidhu and me were tied up with work and were not able to decide a date. However, the permit was expiring on Dec 02, 2016 and we had to decide on our dates before that. Flight availability was another issue and we finalised our trip from 29 Nov to 02 Dec 2016. We were fortunate to get the tickets as there is only one flight which operates between mainland and Lakshadweep.

Once dates were finalised, we had to decide on what to take with us. I had purchased an ICOM 7300 as a standby radio and it was a no brainer to take this radio with us. Then came the most difficult part. We had only an old refurbished marine amplifier with us which can run nearly 300-350w. Looking at the propagation reports and abysmal number of sunspots, we had no choice but to carry an amplifier. Looking at the flight ticket I

realised we have a baggage allowance of 15kg only. This meant between us we can carry only 30kg + hand baggage. The worst part is even if we pay extra they may not be able to accommodate extra baggage since the aircraft (ATR 72-600) is small with limited baggage area. We made a list of all that we have to carry along with their weights. It all added upto 40-45 kgs. Then came the scariest part of dropping items one by one to remain reasonably within the weight limitation. In the end we ended up with 1 rig, 2 power supplies (13.8v for IC7300 & 24v for Linear amplifier), 1 laptop, 2 12m spider poles, tools, ropes, 3 bundles of coax cables (total of 200'), pre-cut verticals for 4 bands, mobile phones and chargers, an internet dongle (high hopes of getting internet:)), power extension boxes and clothes and other personal stuff for both of us. Final tally was 40 kg of checkin baggage and 3 pieces of hand baggage (which we didn't weigh- neither they did!).

During CQWW CW contest weekend, Sidhu had squeezed some time to visit my place to review all the items and we managed a mock installation of a 40m vertical on 12m spider pole. This proved to be the best preparation we had done. On the island, we never had to pause during installation of 4 antennas and this saved considerable amount of time for us. Also this gave us the guts to decide on QRT time which was just 1:30 minutes before our vessel sailed from the island.

After a hectic day at work for both of us, final packing was done and Sidhu was expected to arrive by 6:30am morning at my place. I checked with him in the morning and he was already on his way at 5:15am and ETA was 06:00. Everything seemed to fall in place after all. I was ready to leave as soon as he reached my place. The wait in fact stretched a little longer than expected... No sign of Sidhu even close to 6:30????? At last just after 6:30, his car rolled in... A very tired looking Sidhu got of the car. Poor thing felt sleepy on the wheel and had to pullover and take a nap!!! the fatigue has already started????

After a quick fix of Sidhu's KX3's power cord which was converted to a power pole for compatibility, we left for the airport. The check in process took a long time and the fact that we we had excess baggage didn't help us either. The wait at the cash counter followed. Today every queue seemed to be very long!!!. We rushed at last for the security checkin and believe me, we had not planned for this... pileups have started already!!!!We expected lots of questions by the CISF about our radio and other stuff, but luckily beyond a few inquisitive glances at the camera bag which carried our rig, all of them seemed pretty relaxed.

The flight was used to recharge our batteries and between our naps, discussed what was to be our operating plan. Sidhu was primarily a phone operator and we decided that I will run on CW and share some SSB time and Sidhu will concentrate on SSB. Everyday we decided we will spend time for sightseeing etc during daytime. (which didn't happen except for day two on island)



The flight landed into Agatti at 11:30 local time and paperwork was swift, thanks to my friends on the island who were taking care of our itinerary. We got into a small van which took us to the jetty where the vessel was waiting to leave for Kavaratti. We stepped into a local tea shop and tasted the local sulaimani chai (Black tea) with a few local friends. The vessel journey was smooth and peaceful despite the Malayalam movie which



was playing at full volume on numerous TVs onboard. The locals initially gave us curious glances but gradually lost their interest in the "mainlanders with strange boxes" and immersed in the latest Jayaram thriller!



We landed on the island by 1:45 pm. While we were busy getting our bags out of the vessel, I was greeted by my close friend from Island who literally came and swept me off my feet.... It felt good to be among old friends.....



After a short ride to the resort which was going to be our home for next 3 days, we checked in and were told to freshen and have lunch. We hurriedly finished our lunch and started unpacking. We were deputed some helpers from the resort staff for our antenna poles and other general help.

A quick survey showed that we had a great location at the beach for the antenna. Since both of us were new to such a location, we decided to split the antennas and have 20m and 17m on the roof of our 3 storied resort and have 40m & 15m vertical at the beach.



Immediately we realised we don't have sufficient cable to run for all antennas. This meant we will have to switch the cable from one antenna to the other for each QSY. But our resort manager offered another option of a hut near the beach which gave us an alternate idea of a second shack!. Final decision was made to have 2 antennas with short cables on terrace for 20 and 17 and one table was setup at the beach hut as our second operating position. From the hut we just deployed the remaining long cable to the beach and fixed the antenna where the cable ended :) - we didn't have any other choice!. Plan was to operate from the room during daytime and switch to the beach hut at night.



After all antennas were erected, we retired to the room with some tea and switched on the rig. Bad experience in Rameshwaram where we were taken by surprise by cheap led lights which generated 59+ QRM on all bands was fresh in my mind...



Luckily the bands sounded very fine with minimal noise. First CQ call was put out by me on 17m SSB UTC 12:59:00. Nothing was heard for a long time and we switched to 20m and we had our first QSO on log at 13:22:19 DL3LO. In a short while, things started to change and we had a taste of things to come....pileup has started at last....After a few QSOs, we had an operator change and Sidhu was on air now...Operations

were on 17m and 20m. 17 sounded more promising. 20m had higher noise level. We had good run till dinner time. Sidhu was operating SSB and I decided to freshen up and head out to meet my friends in the island. By the time I came back, it was dinner time and we decided to try 40m CW after dinner.

One comment about food- Sidhu is a hardcore vegetarian and I had warned him about difficulties he might face on island. Surprisingly, the resort had fantastic food - both veg and non-veg!.

Post dinner, we carried the whole station down 3 floors and on to the beach hut. There was a power point, but no lights at the operating position. We used flash light on mobile phone and setup the station. Once I started my run on 40m CW, the real magnitude of the pileup was evident. Kiran on phone informed us that we are being spotted in W. This was news to us and we didn't expect anything to be heard in W except during grey line. Immediately, we switched to calling for NA every 30-45 minutes. We could pull in some, but EU kept calling on top and it made it very difficult to copy Ws who were copiable, but not strong. I am sure we have lost a few QSOs this way.



Sidhu kept me company for a couple of hours, then decided to take some rest. I, along with the company of a thermos filled with "sulaimani" kept going till early hours. I stopped only by 7:30 am local time. I was sleepless and disoriented and ears kept ringing from 8-9 hours operation. We shifted our station back to the room and decided to try 20 and 17 from there during daytime. The resort was expecting around 180 guests that day and we

were told no operations will be possible from beach till 5-6 pm in the evening. I went to sleep and Sidhu kept the station going on 20 and 17 on SSB. I woke up close to 11:30 am



and realised my breakfast was still waiting. I had my breakfast and rested for some more time and then went for a light lunch with Sidhu. Post lunch, I decided to give it a try on 17m CW and was greeted immediately with a good pileup. We couldn't keep going for long since we had decided, we will try and see if we can get some internet connectivity nearby. My friend promised I can visit his office and use the broadband - But we were warned it maybe slow. I felt any sort of connectivity should be fine as I wanted to push out first club-log upload. This became a priority as we noticed more and dupes were getting into the log. We could understand the concern of those who worked us when conditions were marginal. "Slow "

internet was an under statement. It took me 15 mins to checkin to club-log and upload first set of QSOs. After some frustrating 50-60 minutes of trying to catchup on mails, I gave up and headed back. Sidhu was forced to be off air since we had only one laptop. But the limited browsing told me that the dxpedition is being welcomed by the community and were expecting us to spend more time on radio than sight seeing. This changed our priorities and I decided to make every minute count



and to spend as much time on radio as possible. When I came back Sidhu was fast asleep so I decided to try some more CW operation. Conditions were fair but QSO rates were 60-70 only primarily due to multiple stations calling on top of each other.

I kept operating till evening and let Sidhu sleep so that if required, he can run though the night. Evening Sidhu resumed operations and we stopped for early dinner and decided to shift the station and try

40m again for the night. I started on CW, but the pileups were not as huge as previous

night and previous sleepless night started to show on me. Once we realised QSO rates were going down, Sidhu stepped in and resumed SSB on 40m. I tried to be around, but despite hot "sulaimani" which was kindly provided by our hosts, I succumbed and went to bed. Sidhu kept the radio buzzing and he had bagged around 3-400 QSOs by morning. I woke up by 6 am and came down to the hut to relieve Sidhu. I took over on CW and wanted to give it a try for NA/SA hoping to make some use of grey line propagation. We got a few, but it was painfully slow going and we started hearing more of middle east, asiatic Russia and finally local VUs. We operated on 40m CW and then SSB trying to net some more Ws. We got some information from friends on mainland to shift to a different frequency and to operate split listening on 7140 or above. 7095 was TX frequency and we were listening on 7150. We realised this created some confusion for local hams who were not familiar with such a wide split operation. After some confusions, we shifted to simplex to accommodate any local stations trying to work us with home-brew rigs where split is not available. We didn't hear much and decided to call off 40m operation. After breakfast, we went for a walk near the beach to inspect antennas. all looked good and I told Sidhu jokingly that coming to Lakshadweep and not touching water will be a crime in our non-ham friend's circle. The best we could do was to wash our feet in the beach:). Once we were satisfied with antenna condition, I went back to the hut and started to work on 15m CW. This day, we were the only ones in the resort and was assured no-one will disturb us through out the day. We had a very good run through out the day on 15m CW and I switched to SSB during late afternoon to accommodate some SSB requests which had come before we setoff to the islands.

Sidhu was able to rest during afternoon and he was well rested and was raring to go for one more night run on SSB. This was to be our last evening and the QSO count had crossed 2500+ and we were looking at winding up with nearly 3000 QSOs. This was good news for us since the expectations were very low both from ourselves and even from the whole dx community since the operations were to be holiday style with minimum equipment and both of us are rookies.

We had a short chat over tea and also discussed with friends from mainland VU DX and contest group. We decided to give it our best for one more night and give as many QSOs to the community. We decided the best operating setup and condition was from beach hut on 40m SSB/CW and that 20m and 17m antennas can come down. I got the help of resort staff to bring down both antennas. I ran on CW for sometime and then Sidhu took over for 15m SSB. I had to visit my friends and bid adieu to them. I went out by 7 pm and came back to see Sidhu had shifted to 40m already. We finished our dinner and I took over on 40m CW. I kept going till midnight and then Sidhu continued on SSB. I managed to sleep for sometime while Sidhu kept the QSOs going. The conditions were difficult on 2nd and 3rd night and multi-path signals made copying signals very difficult with lots of flutter and QSB.

I woke up by 5am and rushed to see the QSO count. When I entered the hut, Sidhu was pulling in DG7BST at 23:40:24 and he announced that this was the last QSO and he signed off thanking all who worked us. We had made 3333 QSOs!!!. Immediately we went to work dismantling remaining antennas and packed everything. We decided to leave the amplifier back with my friend who can send it to me through someone later. Paying excess baggage on return trip also was not required. All items were packed and we were dropped back to the jetty in time for vessel at 0700 am.

The resort staff was kind enough to pack us some breakfast and with a heavy heart we bid farewell to all of them. This trip is going to be in our hearts for a long time to come and both of us were sure we will try and go back at some later date. Both our families were going to be upset seeing pictures of our trip.

We reached Agatti and during our trip from jetty to airport, we met some more old friends and reached well in time to finish check in formalities.

The aircraft carrying us took off for the mainland. We landed back in Bangalore by 3:30 pm in the afternoon. Both of us were extremely tired, but happy about the whole trip and what we could achieve with a humble setup. We were flooded with messages and mails from many friends from the community which was extremely encouraging and has for sure lifted our spirits to try out some more adventure in the future!

I would like to thank the whole DX community, especially our friends in VU DX and contest groups who were a constant source of encouragement and timely tips as to how to go about the whole operation.

I decided that I will try and put it in a report before the memory starts to fade.

To conclude, I would like to share these final points which would summarise our expedition.

1. It was a low budget, low key, limited logistics operation which became a reality just because of excellent support from the whole community.
2. Equipment wise, it proved a very basic setup at a good location is better than very good setup at a poor location as far as antennas and power are concerned. If you are near water, put your antennas right at the beach!!!! Even a military surplus amplifier running 300w will give you excellent results. But we missed a foot switch- more on that later....
3. We operated pretty much un-assisted except some help from mainland from our friends. This became a bit of a handicap since we have developed a habit of depending on rbn and cluster for everything!!!

4. I should appreciate Sidhu who operated with a big handicap- we couldn't operate on VOX at the beach hut due to the high wind noise. He had to use PTT always and it is extremely difficult to type and use PTT at the same time. A foot switch would have been fantastic!!!, well this one goes into the list for next dxpedition/ flied day- if and when it happens!!!
5. We didn't have a roster, but were able to adapt and adjust to each others requirements. A good partner meant the operations were smooth.
6. A good host/ resort means you are well fed and rested to operate. Thanks to Paradise Hut and their staff.
7. We were not successful in working with a target area when we wanted. This will be a point to keep in mind- How to work say JA or W when you want to work them, ie when propagation favours those paths. We had too few JAs and VKs in our log, Path to pacific should have been explored and a call made to target those specific areas.
8. Low band operations- We should try and operate on low bands if possible. I have received so many mails asking whether we can try 80/160m.

Some statistics

Courtesy



Operating Time

First QSO: **2016-11-29 13:22:19**
 Last QSO: **2016-12-01 23:40:24**

Number of QSOs

Total QSOs: **3333**
 Unique Calls: **2374**

Band/Mode breakdown

Band	PH	CW	Total	Total %
40	915	1075	1990	59.7%
20	161	32	193	5.8%
17	142	92	234	7.0%
15	312	604	916	27.5%
Totals	1530	1803	3333	

DXCC by Band/Mode breakdown

	PH	CW	Total
40	74	70	87
20	42	18	44
17	35	27	41
15	54	58	78
Totals	86	84	104

Daily QSOs (last 30 active) [Clickable]

Date	Total QSOs	Uniques	Uniques %
01-12-2016	1655	1026	62.0
30-11-2016	1078	774	71.8
29-11-2016	600	574	95.7
Totals	3333	2374	71.2

Multiband QSOs

Band	Total	Total %
4	21	0.9%
3	74	3.1%
2	329	13.9%
1	1950	82.1%
Totals	2374	

Breakdown by Continent

Continent	Total QSOs	%
Africa	30	0.9
Asia	420	12.6
Europe	2433	73.0
North America	312	9.4
Oceania	31	0.9
South America	107	3.2
Totals	3333	100.0

Continent By Mode

Band	PH	CW	Total	Total %
AF	21	9	30	0.9%
AN	0	0	0	0.0%
AS	152	268	420	12.6%
EU	1126	1307	2433	73.0%
NA	149	163	312	9.4%
OC	17	14	31	0.9%
SA	65	42	107	3.2%
Totals	1530	1803	3333	

Continent By Band

Band	40	20	17	15	Total	Total %
AF	16	7	2	5	30	0.9%
AN	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
AS	248	27	10	135	420	12.6%
EU	1331	144	215	743	2433	73.0%
NA	299	3	0	10	312	9.4%
OC	2	12	7	10	31	0.9%
SA	94	0	0	13	107	3.2%
Totals	1990	193	234	916	3333	

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Expedition Impact On Users' Totals (*info*)

Band	160	80	60	40	30	20	17	15	12	10	6	Total	Total %
New Band	0	0	0	47	0	11	16	39	0	0	0	113	28.7%
New Mode	0	0	0	22	0	3	2	7	0	0	0	34	8.6%
New Band + New Mode	0	0	0	19	0	1	5	8	0	0	0	33	8.4%
New Slot	0	0	0	28	0	4	5	9	0	0	0	46	11.7%
New DXCC	0	0	0	101	0	16	13	38	0	0	0	168	42.6%
Totals	0	0	0	217	0	35	41	101	0	0	0	394	

The analysis should be interpreted carefully. Only QSOs that are matched (to a close tolerance) in both the expedition and user log are included. We cannot analyse QSOs where one party does not upload their log to Club Log. Also, if there has not been a previous expedition from a particular DXCC that has been uploaded to Club Log, there will be many more 'new DXCCs' since this will be the first log matching opportunity for the DXCC in question. Please consider this feature to be experimental and certainly do not judge an expedition based only on these numbers!



Some more pictures
Sidhu VU3NXI at the beach.
We hardly had time to holiday. This
holiday had become a radio only
affair! But one of those rare moments
when we could step on to the
beach.....

Here's me (VU2CPL Manoj) with our host
Shoukath and his son.

