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The DX Magazine

The Monthly Magazine for DX'ers

**Desecheo, Albania DXpeditions
Uganda, China, Far East
Farallons IOTA DXpedition,
Events, QSL Information, and More**



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Jack N1DX at the FT757 enjoying the CW pile on the makeshift operating table while the cooler is QRX with 807s.

than we require, is available but will cost twice what we are willing to pay. Our hopes fall on a guy named Steve, who seems to have just what we need. He is out at sea but will be available later in the day. So Bruce and I spent the afternoon driving around NW KP4 killing time and anxiously fantasizing about what will happen in the next 24 hours.

About 6pm we return to Rincon and find Steve at the bar in the Club Nautico. After some negotiating and a few free rums and Coke, he agrees to drop us off on Desecheo on his way out marlin fishing for a reasonable price the following morning. Steve assures us he is very familiar with landing conditions on Desecheo.

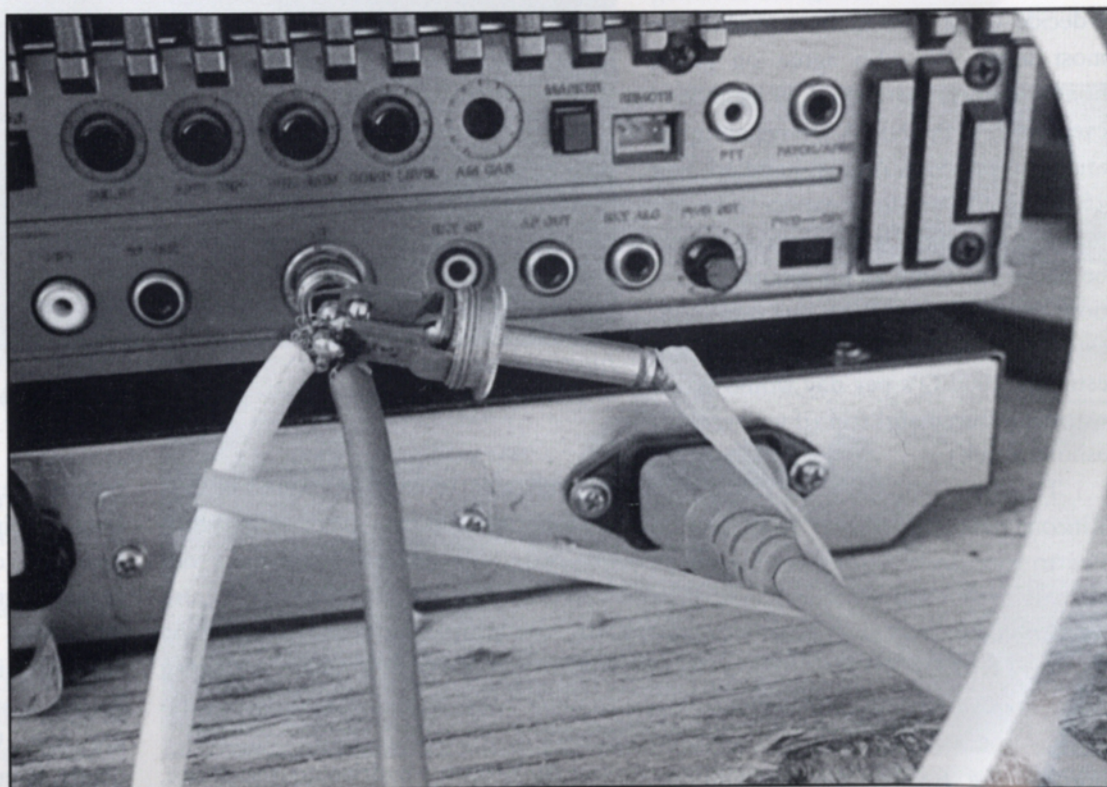
Wow! Our last major logistical problem is solved and it really looks like we

are going to pull it off. We are a little concerned that Steve has only one engine with no backup, but he assures us

he has a reliable radio if we get in trouble. He will even loan us a CB handheld so we can communicate from the island to him in the boat and he will come by to check on us during our 3-day stay. Our main concern is that in Steve's condition he may not remember this conversation. Bruce and I return to Boqueron full of confidence and optimism that mañana will find us on KP5!

Wed., 0430L (All times are local: GMT minus 4 hours.)—Pack the car, drive to Rincon (dodging sugar-cane harvesting equipment on the move) and arrive at daylight. Seas are mercifully calm but will probably build later in the morning.

Wed., 0730L—Steve arrives an hour late; waves are already increasing; We launch and load his boat. Battery dead, won't crank over; Steve tries to hand crank a 150HP outboard! Bruce and I look at each other and wonder if the DXpedition just might end here. Finally the engine reluctantly starts. No radio in



Bruce's "interface" for Jack's Heath keyer. Advance planning will never anticipate all problems of an operation, and ingenuity can overcome some glitches.

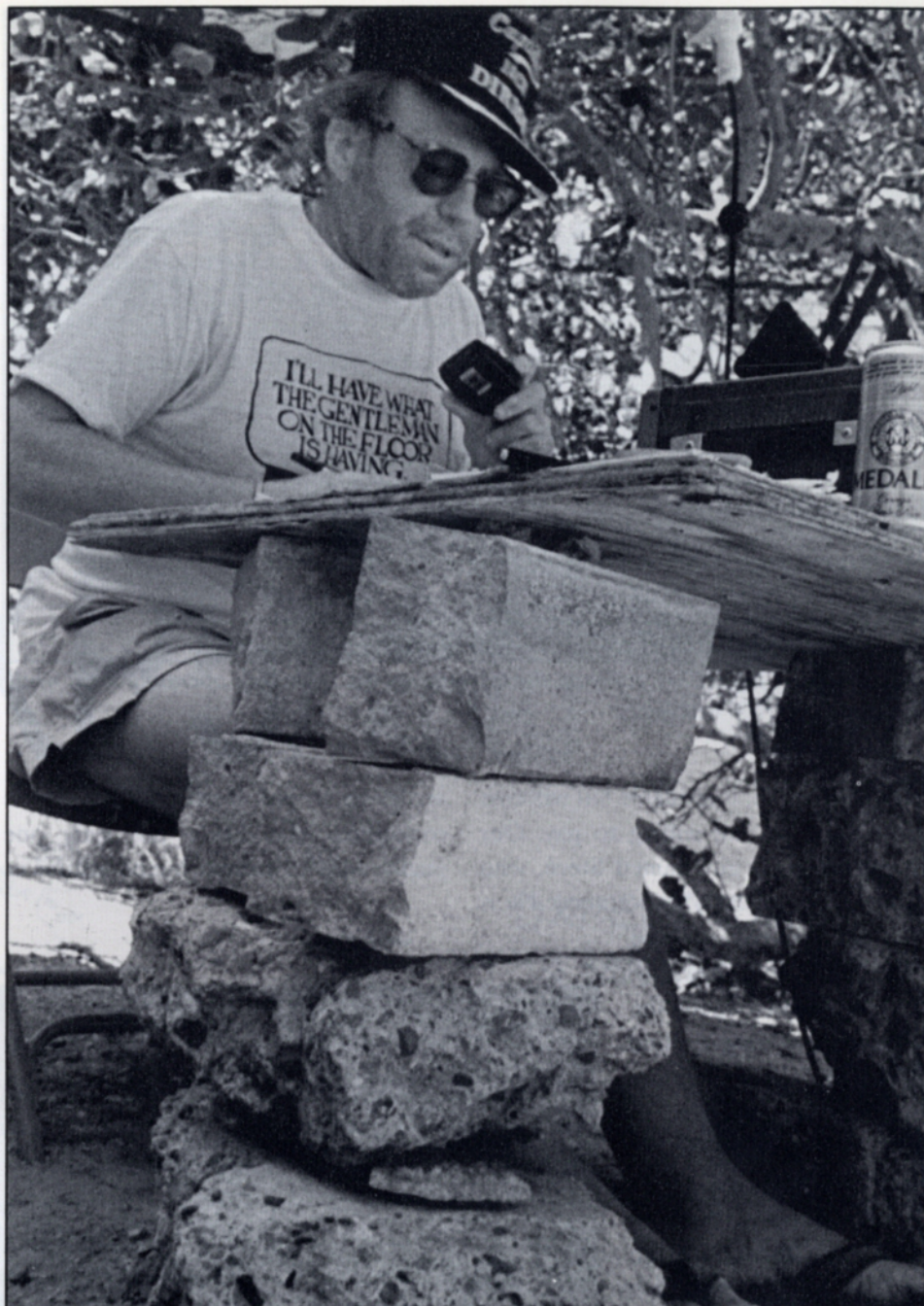
We have been told that if we get stranded on Desecheo and the U.S. Coast Guard has to fly a helicopter rescue mission, it might cost us \$800/hr. We realize our very modest expedition budget would be seriously compromised if this were necessary.

Bruce is getting a bit apprehensive (scared?) and at a weak moment suggests that if we don't make it our primary landing day (11 March), I should go alone with Mike and he will talk to me from KP4. For many reasons this idea is not at all feasible and Bruce soon returns to his senses. As it turns out, our schedule did not fit Mike's, and he does not accompany us anyway.

Monday, 9 March—Bruce flies to San Juan, rents a car, and drives across the island to Boqueron, arriving about 8pm. We set up his equipment in my little cabana, and give it an operational/familiarity checkout.

We debate whether we should each use our own callsign or one of our calls for all CW contacts and the other for SSB. Also the merits of signing KP5 before or after our callsigns. Bruce and I decide using KP5 in front makes the most sense. We also agree on giving honest reports instead of 59 or 599 to everyone. As the KP2A Desecheo operation the previous August handled over 25,000 QSOs, we don't expect to be too much in demand. Bruce suspects it may be about the same as his annual operations from ZF. Ha! With our very modest equipment and low antennas, we estimate 1000 Q's per day would be an extremely successful trip (if we even get ashore at all!)

Tuesday, 10 March—We drive to Rincon, nearest town to Desecheo in Puerto Rico, to look for a boat to transport us to the island. Since open fires are forbidden and we have no other means of cooking, we stock up on easily eaten foods. This trip is certainly not going to be a gourmet experience! We purchase two 6-gallon gas cans and one for drinking water. Unable to borrow a



Judicious stacking of on-site concrete rubble with our "borrowed" plywood shimmed in place provided an adequately stable operating platform.

folding table or purchase one cheaply, we scrounge a 3' by 4' piece of half-inch plywood with which to construct our "elaborate" operating table. We also purchase a 10' by 12' tarp we hope to be able to support over our operating position for shade and protection from the rain.

In Rincon we drive to the shore, get our first glimpse of Desecheo and

become very excited just looking at our long-anticipated, very elusive destination. Seas are quite calm and we start to realize that our goal is really going to be attainable. I had anticipated little difficulty acquiring a boat. Wrong! Rincon harbor is very small and suitable boats are few. One boat, perfect for our needs, is busy with a Japanese film crew and unavailable. Another, much larger



Landing at KP5! Our few boxes of equipment—bare essentials (including a case of beer)—seemed quite a burden for two middle-aged DXers to carry ¼ mile. N1DX on the left.

more important because it is considered a "separate country," they look at me as if I might not been playing with a full deck!

22 Feb.—Bruce does his homework, contacts KP2A and others, and gets info on where and how to get landing permission. No one in Boqueron ever told me the Fish & Wildlife people indeed have an office just a few miles out of town!

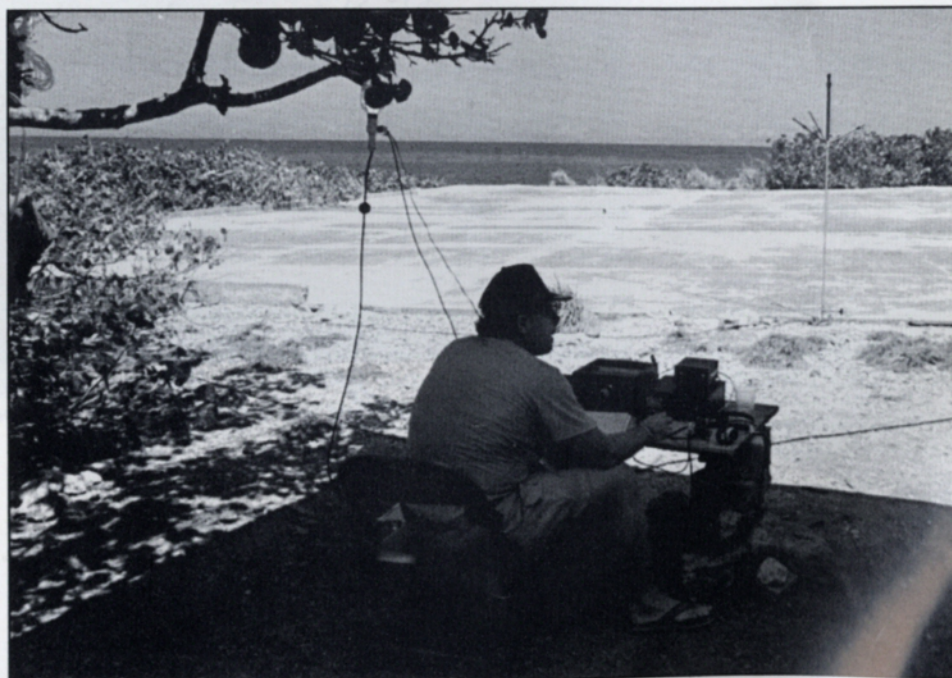
26 Feb.—We set up regular skeds between Puerto Rico and Kansas. Bruce has arranged to bring his family for two weeks and will fly in five days ahead of them for a one-shot attempt at KP5. He will be bringing a Yaesu FT-757 and 4-band Spider mobile whip. I plan to contribute my antenna tuner and longwire for possible use on 80 meters. No backup rig or beam will be taken. 160 meters and WARC bands aren't even considered at this point.

We both contact Susie Rice at the F & WS near Boqueron and she does all she can to discourage us. Homo sapiens aren't appreciated on Desecheo as they supposedly disturb the wildlife, so she

again reminds up in graphic detail what could happen with drug runners, illegal aliens, unexploded bombs, landing dangers, rats, lack of water, and real possibility of getting on the island but

not getting off for days or even weeks. We tell her to send the permission forms anyway, while we give it some more serious thought. Susie calls Bruce a day or two later and mentions that Mike Evans, a biologist studying goats on Desecheo, wants a ride out there and could he tag along with us? At first it seems this would complicate our already very tentative plans. I phone Mike, who lives near San Juan, and find that he has spent a total of three years at various times on Desecheo and is certainly the world's foremost expert on the island. He answers numerous questions we have about conditions there, which is much appreciated. Bruce and I decide Mike's knowledge and experience would be very helpful to us, not to mention some extra manpower if we encounter "unfriendly neighbors." We look forward to him accompanying us.

6 March—Our last QSO before Bruce leaves for KP4. I am running on the 500-watt Honda generator I have arranged to rent from friends. Signal is stable and gas consumption only ½ gallon in six hours!



The tent, supplies, and operating position fit comfortably amongst the trees, while the Spider antenna, radials, longwire, and generator extended onto the Coast Guard's concrete helipad.

Barefoot Cruises of Miami) and operated from quite a few semi-rare locations such as CE0A, VR6, KH8, 5W1, YJ8, H44, and ZD7. But these were all inhabited places, where we operated out of people's homes or hotels with available electricity, etc. It was very exciting being on the DX side of many huge pileups, but it still did not satisfy my lifelong fantasy.

October 1990—I answer an ad in the *Boothbay (Maine) Register* to help sail a boat from Maine to the Caribbean via Bermuda, and end up three weeks later in Boqueron, a lovely little town on the SW coast of Puerto Rico. Got a bartending job and settled in for the winter.

January 1991—While deep-sea fishing with friend Don Galloway in the Mona Passage between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, I spot a small island low on the horizon about 25 miles away. When Don informs me that is Desecheo Island, bells go off in my head as any DXer would react to the unexpected sight of Navassa, Spratly, or Mellish Reef. I resolve then and there to find out more about KP5-land and the possibilities of operating from there.

Subsequently inquiries reveal that Desecheo is a National Wildlife Refuge administered by the U.S. Department of Interior Fish & Wildlife Service, this qualifying it for unique DXCC status. It is uninhabited, approximately one mile in diameter, with wild goats placed there by Colum-

bus during his third expedition to the New World, three Rhesus monkeys surviving a medical research breeding experiment, lizards up to two feet long, land crabs, hermit crabs, and rats. In over three miles of shoreline there is only one suitable landing area, a small

ploded bombs from when Desecheo was used as a bombing range during WW II.

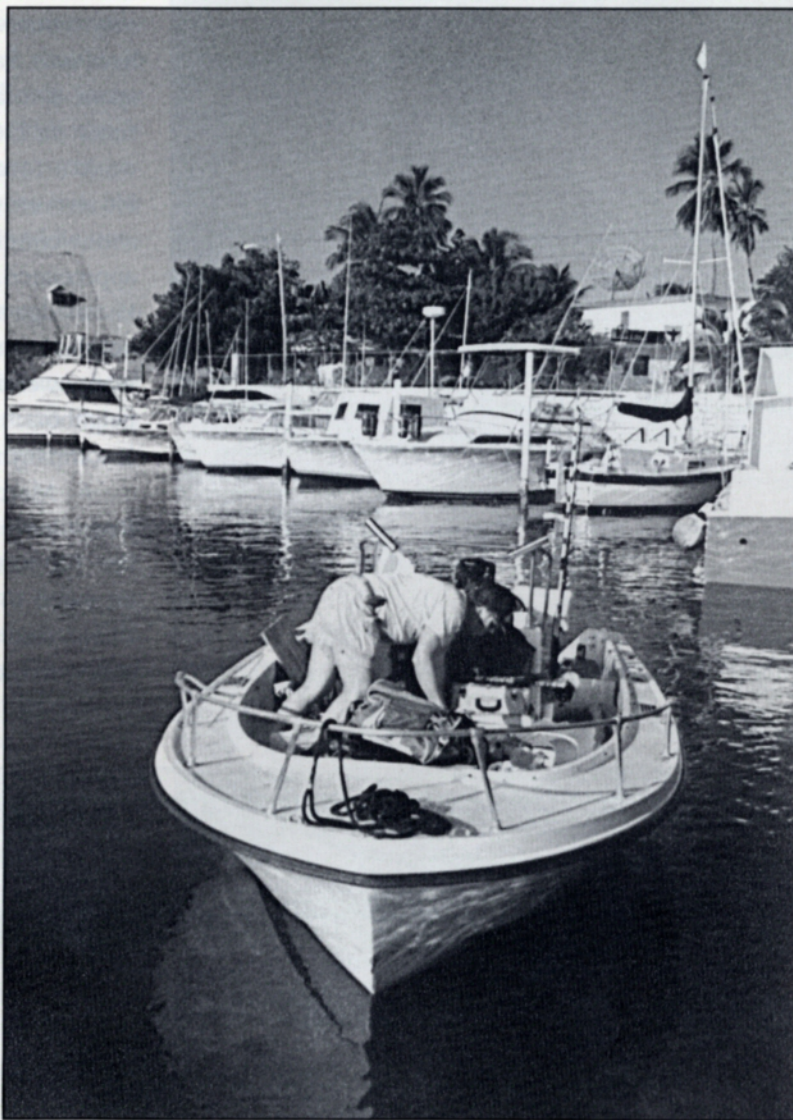
December 1991—In my annual Christmas card to Bruce and family from my home in Maine, I mention plans to return to Puerto Rico for part of the winter and thoughts about operat-

ing from KP5 and ask if he'd be interested in joining me. Bruce phones soon after and says his family is seriously considering swapping two weeks of ZF time-share for Puerto Rico in March and he is definitely interested if it is feasible. We agree it would have to be low-budget, modest equipment, three days maximum. When Bruce mentions that his wife, Janice, laughed when he described our plans, I make a more determined resolve to pursue it seriously!

10 Feb. 1992—I return to Boqueron and start making further inquiries as to the feasibility of getting onto Desecheo. Everyone I meet advises landing can be very treacherous, especially in winter when winds and seas do not cooperate. It does not look good, as our landing date will not be very flexible. We give ourselves a 50/50 chance of success just getting on the island. I have brought a

tent and sleeping bag from home, just in case we get lucky.

Most Puerto Ricans I talk to advise going to Mona Island instead, as it is much larger, more accessible, has wild iguanas and is more scenic. When I try to explain why Desecheo is so much



Preparing for departure from Rincon. With four souls aboard, even our meager equipment manifest was a full burden for a 20' boat negotiating the Mona Passage.

cove on the SW corner approached through a 15' gap in the volcanic rock leading to a 100' rocky beach. Seas must be very calm to allow a safe landing. Once ashore, there is also a real possibility of bumping into drug runners, illegal aliens from HI-land and/or unex-

Desecheo Mini-DXpedition

Two DXers Make Thousands of QSOs from this Caribbean Rock, Until the Beer Runs Out

by Jack Corson N1DX

Ever since I was a Novice in 1965 at age 12, I have dreamed of some day going ashore on a deserted island, setting up a

totally self-sufficient ham station, and working the world. In 1979 Bruce Frahm KØBJ and I went around the world

together for ten months on the "M/V Yankee Trader" (an old oceanographic research vessel used by Windjammer

Desecheo reveals more of its rugged character as we approach from the east.

