

the boat and no CB handheld as promised, but we are just thrilled to be on our way! Desecheo looms larger and larger as we approach. Rocky cliffs, surf crashing on volcanic rocks, east end very dry, cactus, more vegetation toward the west end, guano-covered cliffs, a white goat high up on one of them.

Wed., 0900L—We slip easily through the narrow opening in the rocks and jump out in thigh-deep water. Bruce and I lug our supplies ashore while Steve's mate stabilizes the boat in light swells. They hang offshore and direct us to our operating area, then take off for marlin fishing. Now the work begins!

We carry all our gear ¼ mile over sharp rocks and across rubble-strewn beach, passing a 10' square concrete bunker once used to house an undersea cable termination during WW II. We peer inside and on the walls are scribbled various graffiti and names and call signs: "NP4C/KP5," "KD5SP/KP5 3-11-85," "K5L?O/KP5," etc. Although not far from the water, we make a mental note that this could be a welcome refuge in the event of severe WX. We continue uphill on a path through grassy swell to a perfect little spot adjacent to a concrete 50-yd square helicopter landing pad. About 50 feet above sea level, beautiful view all around, surf crashing on rocks below, grassy hill sloping above, a few low trees, just right for shade and hanging our tarp and hammock. Bruce and I are very impressed with the beauty of the place.

Thousands of small white butterflies flirt about everywhere. We see them for only an hour or so each morning, then they disappear. We wonder if they are native or have migrated from places unknown.

We each make four trips, increasingly hotter, perspiring like mad. We get very thirsty, consuming lots of our precious drinking water. Concern about not bringing enough, but find just sitting around we consume very little. We are grateful we kept gear to a minimum. Flip a coin for last load; Bruce loses. I search for flat concrete chunks to make legs for our plywood table. When Bruce returns, we set up the generator about 50 feet away, using a 60-watt bulb as a

Bruce is off and running, developing a good sized pileup from US and EU. I had forgotten what a good operator Bruce is and how out of practice I am. I am impressed (and somewhat intimidated) by his expertise and quite happy to be busy setting up the tent, stringing our hammock and organizing the campsite. I have not been very active for many years and really out of practice working either end of a pileup.

Wed., 1300L—I decide to try my luck

## DESECHEO ISLAND

# KP5/N1DX KØBJ

- Jack Corson
- Bruce Frahm



## DXPEDITION

### 11-14 MARCH 1992

ballast to smooth out power surges. Bruce tunes up the Spider whip and declares KP5 on the air! At the last minute we decide to use our own call signs, which works out very well.

Wed., 1140L—Bruce fires up on 21CW and is very happy when he works his friend K3JA, whom he had met on Grand Cayman Island during our round-the-world adventure, for our very first QSO from Desecheo Island. By sheer coincidence his second QSO is with Pat K7VAY, whom I knew back in 1974 in Utapao, Thailand when he was HS2AKP and I was HS2AIG. So, I make Pat my very first QSO from KP5, a most unexpected and appropriate one. We are off to a great start!

first on 28SSB (and not rush into the CW thing). Very pleased when Pete N5TP shows up for my sixth KP5 QSO. Pete is another HS friend (HS4AGN) and DXpeditioner (1S1A) from many years ago. We have visited each other in Okinawa and Texas and it is a pleasure to run into him again.

I am soon discouraged after only 11 QSOs in 10 minutes on SSB compared to Bruce's efficient performance on CW, so switch to 21CW and get serious! Nervous at first, I soon settle into a respectable pace. Not as fast as Bruce, I am perhaps a little more accurate in ensuring I have everyone's call correct. This is my first use of full CW break-in, and I am very impressed.



Wed., 1409L—Bruce continues on 21CW. We are both amazed at the pileups...wider and deeper than any we have ever experienced. Clipperton and Afghanistan are also on at the same time, and we sometimes wonder if we are operating near them and people are confusing us with "Real DX." Can KP5 really be this popular? The FO0 and YA activity probably brought more DXers onto the bands, which seemed to help us.

Wed., 1525L—We take a break to discuss matters and lay out my 150-foot longwire atop nearby bushes, no more than 8 feet above the ground. Not very optimistic at its performance, but we have no better alternative. We hope being very close to salt water may compensate for its lack of height.

We set up tentative 2-hour watches, allowing each of us plenty of time "off-duty" to read or rest in the hammock during the day or sleep in the tent at night. The generator runs six hours on a full tank, so we plan to refuel it every five hours. With our dedication to the radio, we communicate very little with each other and look forward to our refueling breaks to compare notes, plan operating strategies, and enjoy the unimpeded sound of the surf.

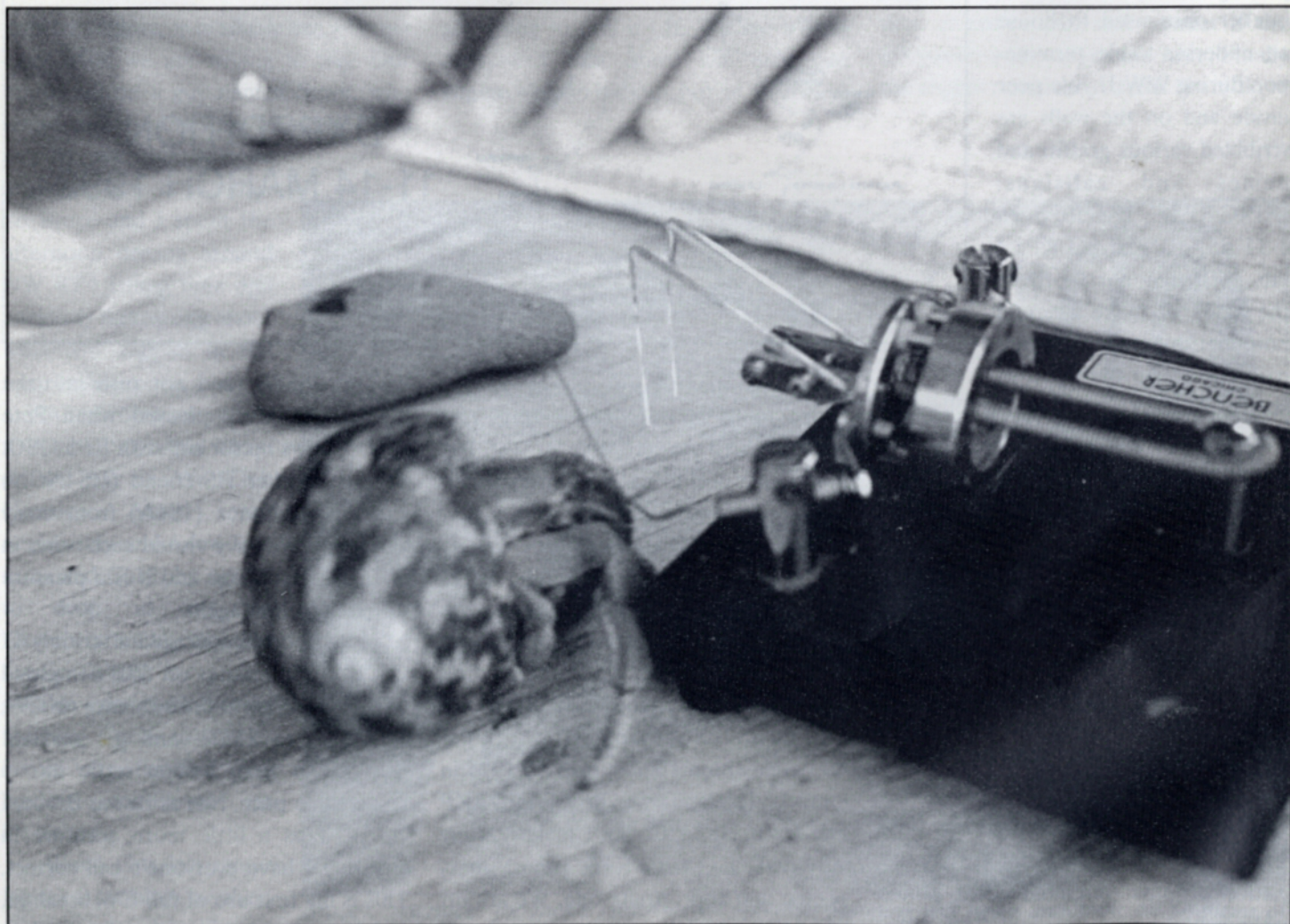
Wed., 1610L—I hit 28CW for 1¾ hours, working mostly US with occasional EU or JA. Feeling much more at ease now on CW, but not quite accustomed to the FT-757 keyer with a different iambic setup than what I am used to. Often the slash bar in my call comes out

sounding like "XE" (I even received a QSL for KP5XE!) Feeling like a lid, I never quite master it, but do the best I can in spite of my "handicap." A perfect example of trying to teach an old dog new tricks!

At dusk we observe several wild goats grazing on a hillside above us about 100 yards away. Adults are black, brown, or gray while the young ones are white.

Wed., 1930L—Sked with Bruce's friend Mike KF0MJ in Kansas and Johnny KP4EAZ/MM, back in Boqueron. We let everyone know we arrived safely and are operating successfully.

Wed., 2000L—We try 3.5 CW. After some difficulty finding a proper match,



*"Many hands make light work" in a CW pileup. If we sounded crabby after a long night of operating, maybe this is the explanation.*



the longwire loads fine! A pileup here, too! Almost all US, but PA3EYZ, I4EAT, UW3PN, and UP2WAX sneak through from EU.

An army of hermit crabs materializes out of the bushes and parades around the campsite, varying from ping-pong ball to softball size. I can't get over their apparent intelligence, gathering in little groups for "conferences," then spreading out to explore the area. It's a real shock when one tries to crawl over our bare feet in the middle of the night, while concentrating on working a pileup.

Thur., 0000L—I decide to give 1.8 CW a try. The tuner doesn't seem to like this low a frequency, but after much trial and error, it does its job beautifully! I tentatively call CQ and exchange 599 with K5UR. We are on low band! Band is very quiet here and signals are strong at our end, but US stations seem to be having some difficulty coping. So I QRS and work 120 stations in two hours, more than in my entire life on 160! Only two or three calling at a time is a big relief after huge pileups on upper bands. G2RBP makes it through at RST 249 for our only EU on 160 meters.

I am really enjoying the more leisurely pace. Bruce is asleep in the tent, it's a beautiful night, almost a full moon, and I am doing well on 160! This was probably my biggest surprise and operating thrill of the DXpedition.

Neither of us gets much sleep this first night, as we are too excited and lay awake listening to our partner operate. Bruce finds himself sending CW in the tent by tightening his jaw muscles.

Thur., 0200L—We don't even know the WARC band frequencies, so Bruce gets this info from someone over the air. K5UR persuades him to try 10 MHz CW. After some difficulty matching the longwire (for some reason on this band feedback would swamp the rig and lug the generator to the point where our ballast bulb would barely glow), Bruce finds the magic combination and puts out a stable signal, again drawing huge

pileups. Sometimes when I wear my lightweight **Telex** headset with the little speaker probes stick in ears, I get RF burns and a warm feeling in my head. Oh well, it's no time to worry about brain damage!

Thur., 0420L—We try 7CW for over two hours and are very pleased to put many JAs in the log.

Thur., 0710-1120L—Over four hours on 18 and 24 MHz, mostly SSB, again draws big pileups and seems to be much appreciated. We now realize we have substantial 9-band capabilities and are very, very pleased! Bruce wakes me at 0844L and asks if I want to talk to Fred K3ZO, another old Thailand hand (HS3AL) and avid tester, on 18SSB. It is great to see old friends and acquaintances from many years ago come out of the woodwork.

Mid-morning, when the temperature is appropriate, lizards up to two feet long show up and take over the area. They are very curious and occasionally nip at our bare toes. More than once we let out a scream (sometimes over the air) as we are "attacked." One larger-than-normal lizard seems to be the dominant one and acts like he owns the place. When he gets too aggressive, I defend my territory with a large rock thrown in his direction and instead of scurrying off onto the bushes as expected, he instead charges straight toward me! From then on it is a constant battle trying to make him keep his distance. But mid-day, when the hot sun really beats down, all the animals disappear. We are quite comfortable in the shade of our tarp.

Thur. pm—Several times each day we are treated to the sight of humpback whales to the north of us about ½ mile offshore, always in the same spot and always heading along the north side of the island. In fact our operating position is perfectly situated to watch them while we are on the air, an unexpected bonus.

Mid-afternoon Bruce decides to cool off and see what Desecheo offers



underwater. He slips away to do some snorkeling around the rocks just below our site and is impressed with the large, very pristine fish in KP5 waters. Bruce is awed by the sight of surf pounding against the rocks as viewed from under the surface.

Shortly after Bruce returns, as if by request, a shower passes by and fills depressions in the concrete helo pad with rainwater. We eagerly get naked, splash about, and wash off two days of sweat and dirt. We wonder if the Big DXer in the sky is somehow watching over us.

Desecheo is truly a little paradise, kind of a mini-Galapagos. The animals seem curious and unafraid of humans and accept our presence in their little world. Bruce and I are constantly impressed with the beauty and serenity of the place. We feel very privileged to be allowed a brief visit to this wonderful spot. All this and DXing too! As they say, "It don't get no better'n this!"

I brought my old Heath keyer but we discover its plug is incompatible with the FT-757, which requires a 3-prong jack. Bruce ingeniously jury-rigs a Rube Goldberg field modification using a paper clip and rubber band. It works okay for awhile but on certain bands RF seems to affect the keying and I finally abandon it for the internal keyer.

Thu., 2200L—A serious rain squall moves through from the east. Heavy downpour for 10-15 minutes. The tarp works fairly well keeping us dry, but the wind starts blowing rain all over the rig, so we so we QRT and hurriedly cover up the equipment. When it passes, Bruce does well on 160 meters for nearly an hour, but both times I try top-band early Friday am, I only eke out a single QSO. Conditions were definitely better on 160 the first night.

In the middle of the night, above the din of a huge EU pileup on 14CW, I hear the rustle of cans in our trash bag hung in the trees. When I sneak up and tap the bag, out jumps a cute little rat

that sits on the limb and stares back at me. Even the dreaded island rats are not intimidating in person.

Getting little sleep the previous night, our 2-hour watch schedule disintegrates into 4-5 hour stints at the rig while the other guy gets some serious shut-eye. I am exhausted. About 5 am Friday, after being on CW for over five hours, I feel like I've been running on autopilot.

Fri., 0500L—Bruce runs US, EU, and JA simultaneously for 90 minutes on 14CW, his biggest thrill of the operation. He is struck by the contrasts between the rudeness of a few EU stations from a boot-shaped country, who never seem to standby, and the extreme courtesy of most JA operators. The JAs are almost *too* polite, as when Bruce copies four or five letters of a 6-letter callsign and sends JA7X??, there is no reply, only to find JA7XXX calling again on the next over. This happens frequently to both of us, on SSB as well as CW. Bruce attempts to keep the frequency spread of calling stations to a minimum, while maintaining a high QSO rate. It is a real challenge, and he succeeds at it.

Conditions hold up throughout the day, with big pileups anywhere we go. We try to hit the WARC bands as much as possible. A rough tally of our QSO totals so far makes us realize that if we keep up this pace and Murphy stays away, we can *double* our initial goal of 3000 QSOs in three days.

Bruce and I are getting a little tired of our diet of canned Vienna sausages and chocolate chip cookies, but one more day won't kill us. Ice is still holding up in the cooler and cold Medalla beers help smooth out the hardships.

Fri., 1325L—Skeeter K8QWY adds some excitement to a routine but productive 3-hour run on 28 CW. I met him 35 years ago in Ohio as a Novice when his grandfather Joe W8FHN was a big inspiration to me.

Bruce wanders off to investigate the nearby area and take some photos. We

are tempted to explore beyond but are forbidden to do so by the terms of our landing permit.

Fri., 1930L—On our last sked with KF0MJ, Mike phones Steve in Rincon, who assures us he will be able to extricate us from the island Saturday morning between 10 am and noon on his return from another marlin fishing trip. We are relieved at that (beer is running low).

Fri., 2335L—Bruce is sound asleep in the tent while I am busy on 160 and 80 meters. Out of the stillness a twin-engine plane swoops overhead about 100 feet up, all lights off, northbound. Very strange! I wonder which side of the drug war he might be on? I listen for gifts falling from the sky and hear nothing.

Sat., 0420L—With only a few more hours to operate, we are anxious to work as many more as we can. 14CW is wide open to EU for about 1½ hours, then swings to JA for over two hours. We really pack 'em away in the log.

At daylight we begin packing up the non-radio gear and refuel the generator for the last time. It has run flawlessly for three days straight. We discover it is low on oil and use every bit of our supply to fill it. If we don't get off the island today, we may have to QRT due to no more oil! This is a perfect example of how this entire expedition operated at all times just a heartbeat from disaster. We'd better get off today! Seas have calmed and it looks favorable for our exodus.

Sat., 0900L—Bruce lets me operate until QRT-time, for which I am very grateful, as he is way ahead of me in QSO totals and I really want to break the 3000 QSO mark.

While deeply concentrating on a CW pileup, I glance up and see four stern-faced, dark-skinned men with a large machete walking toward us across the helo pad. All kinds of thoughts race through my mind, as my first reaction is that they are desperate, starving illegal aliens from the Dominican Republic



about to behead us and thus prevent thousands of hams world wide from ever receiving proof of their contacting KP5 for a new country, IOTA island, or whatever. Can I ever explain in my very limited Spanish how important it is to let us live to carry out this important mission? I holler at Bruce just as they break out in big smiles and greet us with a friendly, "Buenas dias, amigos!"

It seems they are only day-trippers from Mayaguez, P.R. exploring the island and collecting large edible land crabs to take home. After hand-shakes and photos, they entertain us with stories of people finding bales of marijuana and coolers filled with cocaine among the flora and fauna of our beloved island. They go off searching for crabs and we resume packing up.

Sat., 1000L—No sign of Steve. Bruce starts to lug gear to the landing while I try 28SSB for our "last shot." The band seems wide open to US and EU, but no one answers my repeated CQs. Everything appears normal, but no one calls. Finally Bruce points out I have the Clarifier still on and am listening around 28.3 MHz instead of near my TX frequency for 28.49 or so. The FT-757 clarifier has been a constant frustration to me, as it has unlimited range and must be manually disabled when switching frequencies. My apologies to all those who stood patiently by during my brief bout of mental illness. It is enjoyable to work the last few at a leisurely pace on SSB, pausing to ragchew a little and describe life on KP5.

Sat., 1202L—Still no sign of Steve. We decide not to press our luck and pull the big switch. Appropriately, our very last QSO from Desecheo is with Jim N1HOV, in Topsham, Maine, very near my home QHT. Jim generously offers to call my girl friend, Nettie, and let her know we have had a successful trip, which is much appreciated.

We pack up the radio gear, antennas, generator, and accessories and haul it all to the landing, where we find

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several Puerto Rican fishermen who have arrived in their native boats, as well as our friends from Mayaguez. The guts of a recently-slaughtered goat lie on the rocks near the landing. It was definitely not there when we arrived.

Sat., 1400L—It's hotter'n hell waiting in the broiling sun. Bruce and I share the last lukewarm beer and go swimming in the small cove to cool off.

Our new friends generously offer to transport us back to Rincon if Steve doesn't show by 3 pm.

A few minutes before 3 pm Steve and his friend finally arrive in his friend's boat. It seems our ill-prepared boat captain went out fishing that morning, lost his engine, and with no spare engine nor radio, was adrift in the Mona Passage for four hours before being



spotted by a passing Puerto Rican fisherman and towed back to Rincon. At least Steve's friend's boat has two engines, so we can probably count on getting back safe and sound.

Riding back to Rincon on a seat in the bow, getting soaking wet from the spray, it sinks in that Bruce and I have really pulled it off! So many things could have gone wrong, but we beat the odds and did it "the old fashioned way." We are ecstatic!

Total QSOs made exceeded 6300. As this is being written six months later, we have answered over 2600 cards received direct. QSLs are just starting to arrive via the bureaus. Thanks to everyone who sent a "green stamp" (US\$1) or two to help defray DXpedition expenses. We sincerely appreciate them. If anyone still needs a card, please QSL to our respective home QTHs.

Bruce and I have really enjoyed the comments we have received about our efforts, some quite flattering and complimentary. Someone once wrote "Imitation is the ultimate form of flattery," so I guess I shouldn't be too upset by all the QSLs received for N1DX/KP5 (many from JAs) for QSOs on 17 March (21 CW), three days after we left the island!

Then there are the cards received with computer decals and not a single human touch on them, not even a handwritten 73 or signature. Makes one feel as if perhaps the QSO were computerized as well. Short DX QSOs are by necessity impersonal enough as it is. A small sign of human involvement at the other end would be appreciated.

Several cards received had computer labels stating "Band-10." Since we now have a 10-MHz band as well as a

10-meter band, if your computer isn't intelligent enough to know the difference, maybe it's time to re-educate the machine or go back to filling out the cards by hand!

I would like to add that in general operators were quite courteous, stood by when requested, stayed off our TX frequency. I don't recall ever hearing intentional jamming. The few times I checked my TX frequency and found a "policeman" there, his efforts seemed to be beneficial, with short reminders to others that we were operating split, listening up, etc.

Our sincere thanks to the following who helped make our adventure possible: US Interior Dept. —Susie Rice Planning—Mike Evans KP2A, KØPP, and WM2C. On-air liaison—KFØMJ, NSØO, KP4EAZ/MM. QSLing—KFØMJ and Janice Frahm.



*Steve and his colleague Junior finally arrive at the small cove and we depart Desecheo with swelly but smooth seas in Junior's twin-engine boat.*