



T I 9 C F
COCOS ISLAND DX-PEDITION 1970

BAHIA DE CHATTAM
ISLA DEL COCO

CONFIRMING OUR RADIO CONTACT OF:

1970	GMT	RST	BAND	MODE
FEB. 1			80	CW 2xSSB
FEB. 1			40	CW 2xSSB
FEB. 1			20	CW 2xSSB
FEB. 1			15	CW 2xSSB
FEB. 1			10	CW 2xSSB

TI9CF OPERATORS

BERNAL TI2BF
CARLOS TI2CAP
CARLOS TI2CMF
JOSE TI2J
JIM TI2USA
FERNANDO TI2W
DON K6JGS
JOE K9KNW
FLIP W9FIU
WARREN W9IGW

EQUIPMENT:
2-DRAKE T4XB, 84H
2-TASSJR, VERTICAL
DIPOLES 40/80
QSL BY TI2CMF/HK3VA
A. A. 6080, BOGOTA, COLOMBIA

TI9CF 1970 Cocos Island

The operators were Bernal Fonseca TI2BF (Brother of Carlos Fonseca TI2CF), Carlos TI2CAP, Carlos Manuel Fonseca TI2CMF (Carlos later changed his callsign to TI2CF), Jose TI2J (As I recall Jose went to Serrana Bank in 1971, Jim TI2USA (Jim was a Marine guard at the U.S. Embassy in 1970, Fernando TI2W, Don Blankenship K6JGS (today W4PUL), Joe Goggin K9KNW, Roger "Flip" Ries W9FIU, Wayne Warden W9IGW, now W9GW.

THIS IS A CLASSIC STORY OF HOW NOT TO CONDUCT A DXPEDITION

The 1970 DXpedition group to Cocos Island almost cost the lives of all five Americans and about seven Costa Ricans. For the first time the story is told below.

The amateur radio group which eventually landed on Cocos operated only about 100 feet in from the shoreline at Chatham Bay. In 1970 the jungle growth was so thick down to the shoreline that it appeared impenetrable. Today it is completely cleared and there are open paths with wooden benches placed there by the Costa Rican Parks Authority.

When the 1970 DXpedition group landed on Cocos, they were utterly and completely exhausted following a dangerous storm ridden voyage from Puntarenas, Costa Rica. The passage in open seas during a terrible Pacific Ocean storm had completely exhausted the strength of the landing party. This fierce ocean storm almost sank their boat en route to Cocos the day earlier. This caused dangerous flooding of their chartered fishing vessel. Due to a faulty bilge pump, the tuna boat they used for the voyage actually began to sink in mid-ocean between Costa Rica and Cocos Island. This water pump became totally inoperative at a critical moment as the ship was taking on lots of water. It began to sink by mid-day following a storm the night before. After Roger Ries (W9FIU) made emergency repairs to the bilge pump the morning following the great storm, the boat then lumbered on to Cocos Island.

A second storm struck Cocos Island while the crew was landing and off-loading their equipment and before any food could be off-loaded to the island. The only dinghy bringing supplies and personnel to the island was demolished by the raging storm leaving the amateurs stranded ashore for four days with little or no food. The bottom of the dinghy was completely smashed after it was thrown upon the rocks on the small beach at Chatham Bay. With this as a backdrop you may understand why the amateur radio group was unable to consider any other options other than to try to operate close to the beach.

Due to the storm and the heavy cloud cover, the navigator was unable to get good star shots for his sextant readings. Plotting our course was done almost entirely with dead reckoning. Unfortunately, our course was very uncertain at best. So it is interesting and quite amazing that the island was located by using the pirate's method of dead reckoning. They also watched for frigate and other sea birds at daybreak as they flew outward from the island in radial flight to forage for food. The ship's captain then followed the reverse flight of the birds to find Cocos island. A very inexact science, but it worked for the old Spanish pirates and it worked for us as well. This was a DXpedition doomed to failure almost from the onset.

If there is something to be learned from this DXpedition fiasco in 1970, it is to only trust yourself and those who you have observed and tested. Simply put, you must only rely on the organizational and operational talents of people you know and absolutely trust. Also be assured that you have adequate funding for your expedition. In this particular case, the Americans along for this DXpedition were almost entirely at the mercy of their local hosts. One could say that the Americans were at fault for ever

letting themselves be drawn into a situation of total trust of people they didn't even know and people who were primarily concerned with self interests. This reliance on others to do the planning and safeguard their lives while in a foreign country almost cost the Americans their lives when the boat almost sank. First among the most egregious abuses of confidence was when the Americans accepted a rickety old tuna boat to take them to Cocos Island from Puntarenas, Costa Rica. They also relied upon their hosts to provision the ship with supplies adequate for the four-day round trip voyage and subsequent stay on the island. DXpeditions require a tremendous effort to plan and execute. You don't simply travel to a remote location or foreign country and expect everything will neatly fall into place once you arrive. It simply won't. Murphy's law always prevails. Difficult or dangerous expeditions require extraordinary planning to assure they have a fair chance of success.

Because proper planning had not been done before the trip, the food supply for the expedition was woefully lacking. A quick dash by our local hosts to a corner grocery store in Puntarenas, Costa Rica, just before the ship sailed, represented what typified this unusual organizational plan. There were no shopping lists to buy adequate and appropriate provisions for the group. About three or four small cardboard boxes of tinned foods, such as sardines and mackerel, salt crackers, beans, rice and ketchup were purchased just hours before the voyage. This small amount of food was entirely inadequate to sustain the group over the duration of the round trip to Cocos Island. No questions had been asked of the Americans concerning what they would like to eat nor had any thought been given to how the food would be prepared. I recall mostly eating boiled rice with a tomato ketchup topping or sauce, with perhaps a spoon sized portion of sardine for most of the meals during the trip to and from the island. There was obvious discomfort because of the inadequate food portions and the lousy taste of the food itself. The mood among the Americans was one of anger for having been deceived by our hosts. However, we tried to be good guests and make the most of it because, after all, we were going to be operating from Cocos Island, a DX location relatively rare in 1970. Much of our pain and discomfort was simply tolerated and any manifestation of anger deferred until after the expedition was over. That is what mature grown men do in times of adversity. However, each of them promised that it would never happen to them again. Some of the group, such as K9KNW (Joe Goggin) and W9IGW (Wayne Warden) went on to complete several other DXpeditions including Juan Fernandez (CE0), San Felix CE0), Bajo Nuevo (HK0) and San Andres (HK0).

Once on the island, the situation was very bleak during the first 12 hours. Tremendous storms brought lightning and thunder claps so loud, it was absolutely deafening through the thin walls of the tent. Shortly after our arrival, we managed to set up one tent before the worst of the storm hit. In spite of our careful efforts, the downfall of torrential rain filled the interior of an otherwise rainproof tent. Water on the floor of

the tent was about 1 inch deep and we simply were unable to evacuate it. We therefore later fell asleep in the crowded tent with about an inch of water on the floor. It was cold and miserable and just about the very worst night anyone ever spend on one of these "so-called" DXpeditions. During the first night, the tumultuous winds from the storm and the ferocious ocean currents washed one of our generators out into water. The powerful wave action on the beach crashed the dinghy up and down upon the rocks such that by morning there was absolutely no bottom, only one big hole where a bottom used to be. The radio equipment had been wrapped in plastic but both generators had water damage and required extensive cleaning the following day. We were off to the very worst possible start one could imagine. We also had lost our small boat, our life line to the mother ship which waited for us out in the harbor. There was no way to transit between the tuna boat and the island. We were, for all intents and purposes "stranded on Cocos Island" and would remain so for the next four days. We had no contact with the other Costa Rican group that remained aboard the tuna boat. To them, it probably didn't matter very much because their gratuitous trip was to fish near Cocos Island. And.....the worst part of it was we all were hungry.....terribly hungry! However, for the Americans, the sole purpose of going to Cocos Island was only to operate their amateur radio equipment. So the fisherman aboard the tuna boat simply disappeared for a lengthy period of time and left the Americans and two Costa Rican amateurs on the island to fend for themselves.

During the following few days the amateurs were on the island, they managed to exist by eating the few precious treats that Flip (W9FIU) had stowed away as his personal supplies because of his finicky eating habits. Then when the weakness from famine began to seriously affect the group, Jose (TI2J) took his .22 cal. rifle out into the jungle growth and was able to bag a small deer. With this venison meat and a little bit of rice that had been brought along to the island, the amateurs were able to cook a proper meal and regain their strength. I also recall that later someone also rigged a fishing line of some sort and caught a few fish. Without these emergency measures taken to acquire food, the amateur radio group would have been in very serious circumstances as their health deteriorated.

As it turned out, about four days after the amateurs arrived on the island, a Nicaraguan fishing boat approached Cocos Island. They quickly were summoned by the tuna boat that brought us to the island. They were then asked to aid in our rescue if they could provide a small dinghy that could be used to extricate us from the island. They were told that our dinghy was now inoperable due to a bad storm. The Nicaraguan fishing vessel accommodated us and even provided a man to row a small boat back and forth from the island to the chartered boat. Using the small boat, we eventually were able to depart the island with all of the equipment we brought with us. In spite of all the bad luck and very poor planning, the amateur radio group was still able to make about 4,000 contacts from Cocos using the callsign TI9CF.

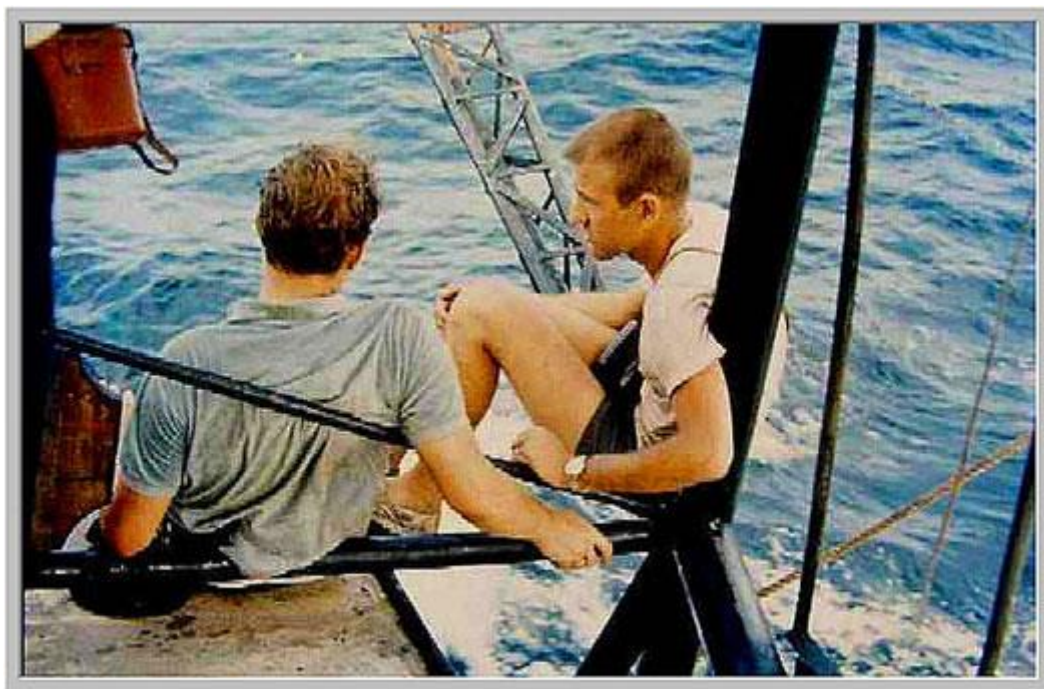
Don Blankenship K6JGS/W4PUL speaking with Wayne Warden W9IGW in San Jose, Costa Rica just before the launch of the expedition. In the background Jim TI2USA and Flip Ries W9FIU.



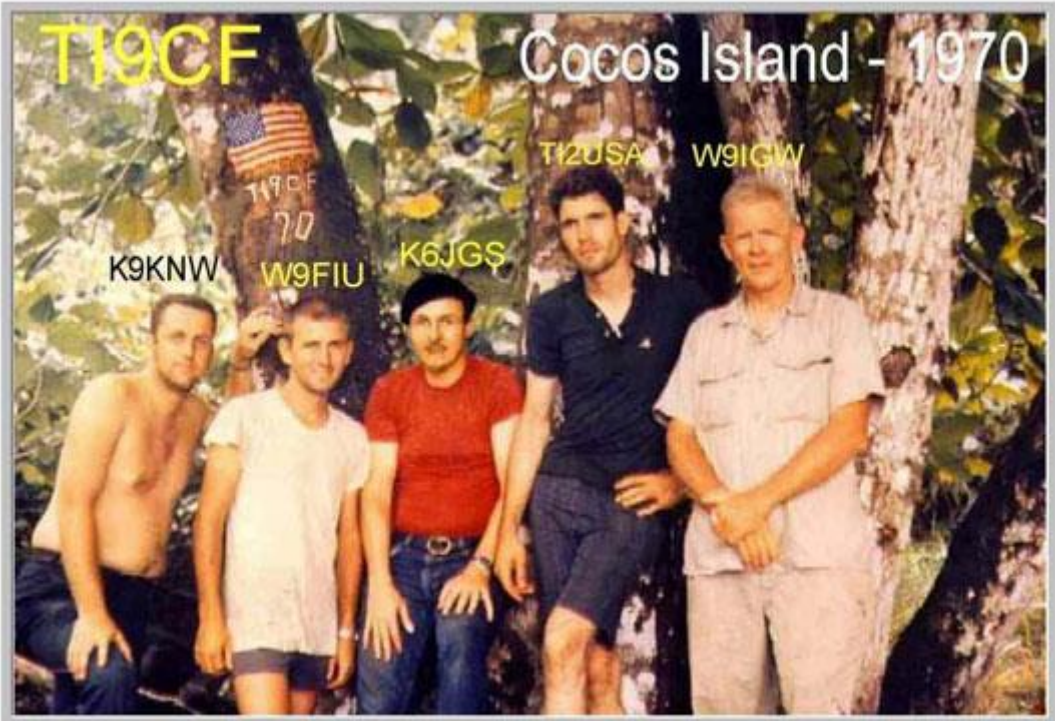
The tuna boat that took the expeditioners to Cocos Island.



From Left to right K6JGS "Don" and W9FIU "Flip" en route to Cocos Island aboard a tuna boat. Flip had just presented his Ph.D thesis prior to this trip. He worked for the U.S. Navy at the University of Urbana in Illinois and also worked part time for Joe Goggin in his mobile electronics business. He obviously was a very bright guy and also an excellent contest and DX operator.



Joe Goggin, K9KNW, Flip Ries W9FIU, Don Blankenship K6JGS/W4PUL, Jim TI2USA, Wayne Warden W9IGW. Jim was a U.S. Marine security guard in San Jose, Costa Rica. He was very tall as you can see in this photo. Not shown are the Costa Rica hams that include Bernal Fonseca TI2BF, Carlos Fonseca TI2CMF, Carlos TI2CAP, Jose TI2J, Fernando TI2W. Notice the carving in the tree on the left.



Legends and Lore of Cocos Island by Peter Tyson

Jacques Cousteau deemed it "the most beautiful island in the world." Michael Crichton wrote "Jurassic Park" with it in mind. Robert Louis Stevenson may have based his classic "Treasure Island" on it.

Cocos Island, 300 miles off the coast of Costa Rica, is legendary for its natural and man-made treasures. The largest uninhabited island in the world, this 10-square-mile tip of an ancient volcano is the only isle in the eastern Pacific that bears rainforest. From the precipitous cliffs towering over the craggy shoreline to the 2,079-foot summit of Mt. Iglesias, the island's highest peak, the luxuriant bed of jungle is rivaled only by scores of sparkling waterfalls that tumble out of the heights.

Yet it is for buried treasure that Cocos is perhaps most famous. Over the centuries before the Republic of Costa Rica assumed control of the island in 1869, pirates used Cocos as a buccaneer bank, secreting priceless artifacts and tons of gold bullion in its inaccessible hillsides. If the legends are to be believed, many of these pirates died from disease, battles, or execution before they could ever return to the island to claim their loot, and it remains there to this day, hidden in natural caves or long-forgotten trenches. One estimate puts the accumulated treasure, if it is indeed all still there, at over \$1 billion.

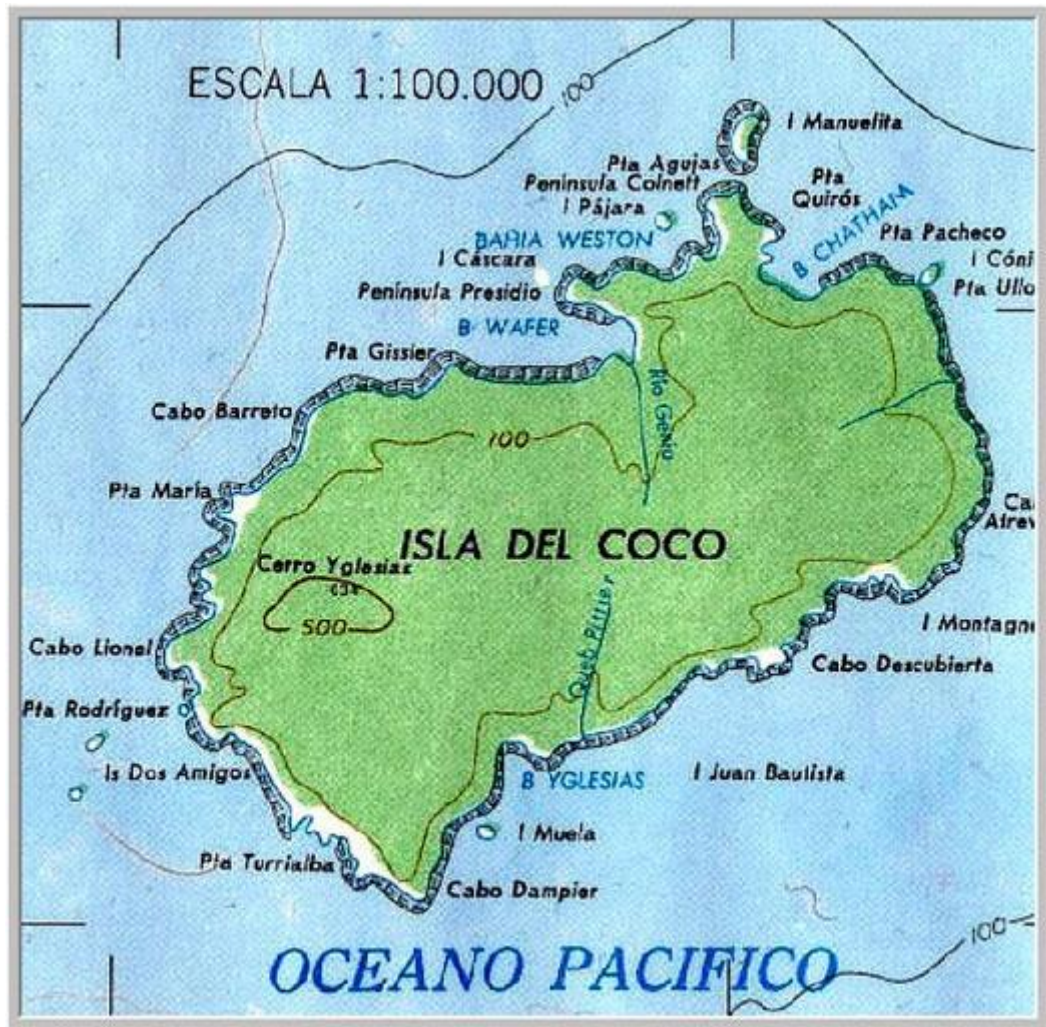
Cocos' story begins in 1526, when the Spanish pilot Johan Cabeças first discovered the island. Sixteen years later, it appeared for the first time on a French map of the Americas, labeled as Ile de Coques (literally "Nutshell Island" or simply "Shell Island"). The Spanish apparently misunderstood the French name and called it Isla del Cocos ("Island of the Coconuts"), which proved apt enough. "'Tis thick set with Coconut Trees, which flourish here very finely," wrote Lionel Wafer, a surgeon who penned one of the earliest descriptions of this island after a visit in the late 1600s. So abundant were coconuts that Wafer's companions made a bit too merry with the milk one afternoon, drinking 20 gallons at a sitting: "That sort of Liquor had so chill'd and benumb'd their Nerves, that they could neither go nor stand; nor could they return on board the Ship, without the Help of those who had not been Partakers in the Frolick . . ."

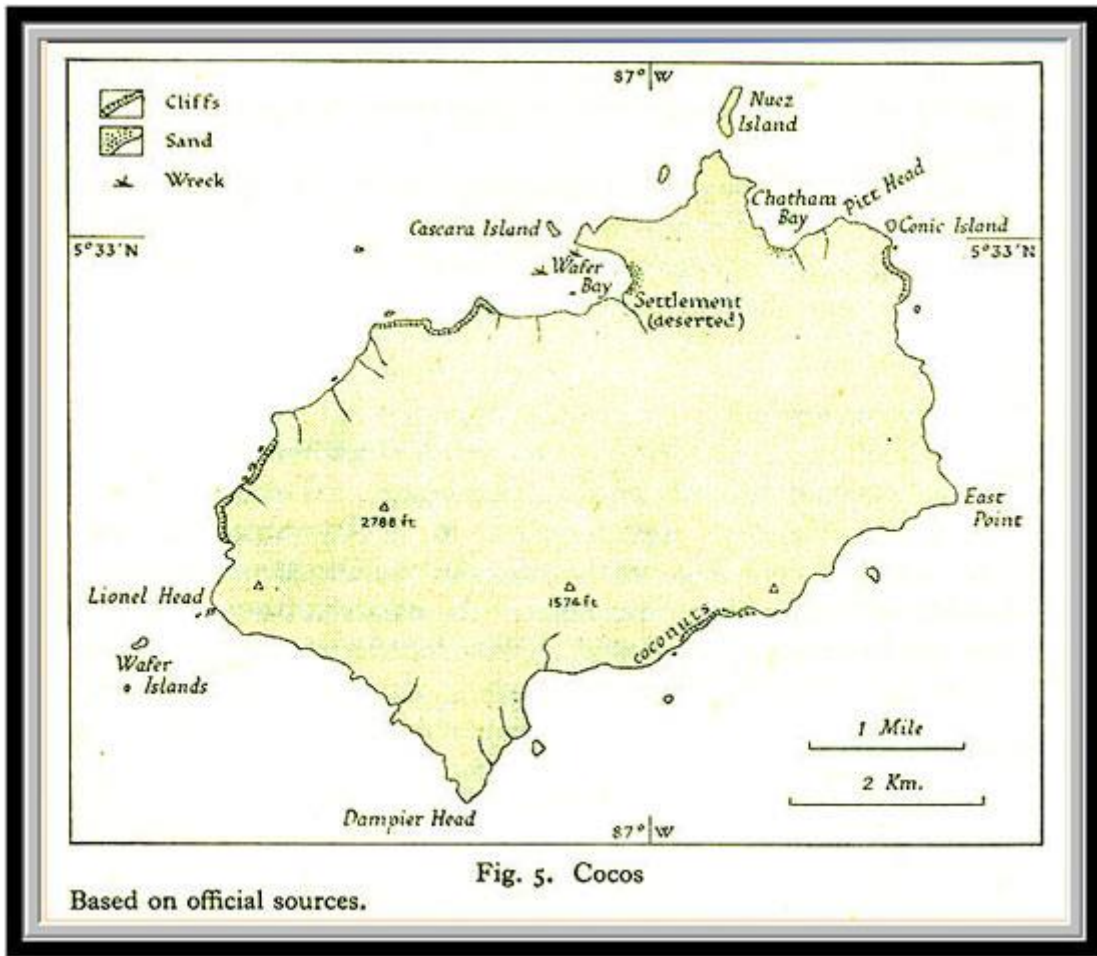
Over the next century, the island became a kind of oceanic truck-stop, where ships of all stripes could rest and take on freshwater, firewood -- and coconuts. Whalers stopped there regularly until the mid-19th century, when their industry in the region collapsed due to overfishing. Captains with missions ranging from exploration to administration of justice dropped anchor in Chatham or Wafer bays, the island's principal harbors. More than any, however, pirates made Cocos their home.

The Golden Age of treasure-burying on the island took place in just a few years on either side of 1820. It all began in 1818, when Captain Bennett Graham, a distinguished British naval officer put in charge of a coastal survey in the South Pacific aboard the H.M.S. Devonshire, threw up his mission for a life of piracy. He was eventually caught and executed along with his officers, the remainder of his crew being sent to a penal colony in Tasmania. Twenty years later, one of the crew, a woman named Mary Welch, was released from prison bearing a remarkable tale. She claimed to have witnessed the burial of Graham's fortune -- 350 tons of gold bullion stolen from Spanish galleons. (A recent estimate put the treasure's present-day value at \$160 million). Moreover, she had a chart with compass bearings showing where the so-called "Devonshire Treasure" was buried. Graham had given it to her, she said, just before he was captured, thinking -- rightly as it turned out -- that it would be safer on her person than on his. Welch's story was believed, as much for her intimate knowledge of the island as for the chart, and an expedition was mounted to hunt for the treasure. Welch went along, of course, and as quite an old woman set foot once again on Cocos. In the decades since she'd been there, however, the lay of the land had changed so much at the hands of visiting sailors that many of her identifying marks, including a huge cedar tree near which she had once camped for six months, had disappeared, and the expedition recovered nothing.

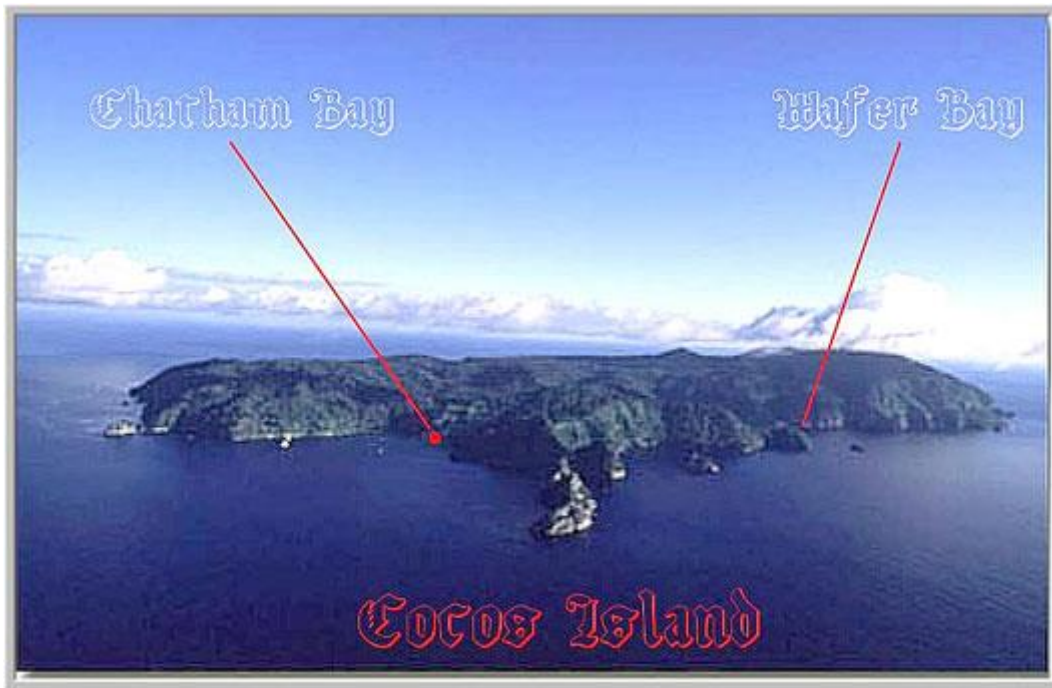
A Spanish map from 1622 showing the location of Cocos and Malpelo Island.







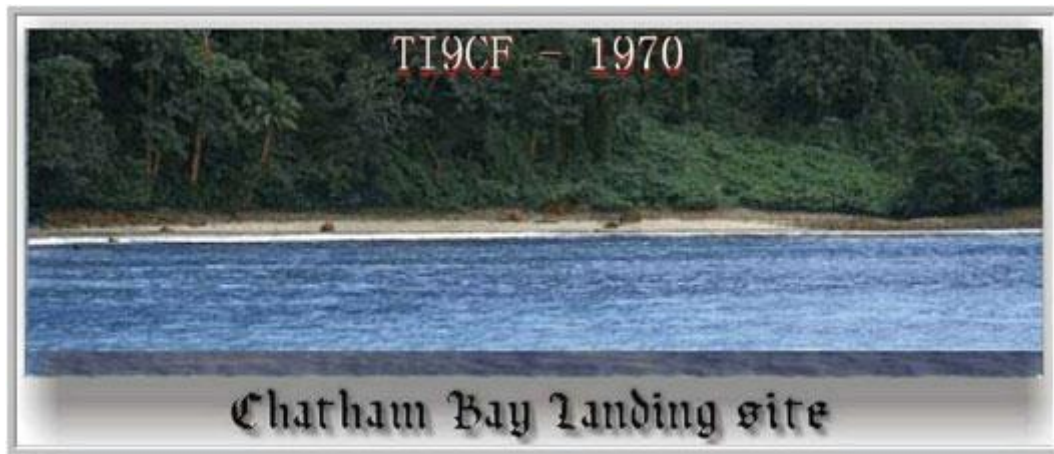
This is the northeast facing of Cocos Island. The red dot shows where the TI9CF expedition took place. You can see that propagation to the northwest at low elevation angles was hampered due to nearby hills.



Here you see the stand-off distance for the charter boat that took us to Cocos Island. The row boat had to traverse this distance to the beach carrying equipment, supplies and personnel.



Closer Approach to the landing site at Cocos Island



There is very thick jungle growth right down to the water line. Cocos has plenty of flora. There are deer and we heard mention of wild boar on the island as well. Obviously there are lots of birds. Fishing is some of the best in the world due to the cold Humboldt current that flows past the Galapagos, Malpelo and Cocos. There is said to be fresh water streaming off the hills after tropical rainfall. The island once was use by pirates during the 1600's and 1700's. It's said there was about 100 million dollars worth of gold buried on the island. This was in 1970 when gold was selling for \$36 dollars an ounce. Today that same amount of gold, if it's still buried there, would be worth \$2.7 Billion dollars.

Captain Christian, an old German sea captain who took us to Cocos Island, had many interesting stories to tell us. He told a story about once taking some treasure hunters out to Cocos. They were very, very secretive and spent a lot of time whispering among themselves. While the treasure hunters were on the island, Capt. Christian discovered

they left a copy of their treasure map behind on his ship. He studied it very carefully and could see that it showed evidence of five pillars or rocks at the beach. This is what the treasure seekers were looking for and had asked Captain Christian about. He told them he'd been to Cocos many times but never seen those five pillars they were talking about. The treasure seekers left after a few days of searching for the buried gold. A few years later Captain Christian was at Chatham Bay during a neap tide when the water level is at a minimum due to the position of the moon. He said he saw those five rocks he'd seen on the map but couldn't remember the relationship of the rocks to where the gold was shown to be buried on the treasure map. He got excited and began to dig on the island himself but soon realized that without metal detection equipment, he'd never find the buried gold. Even the government of Costa Rica has send expeditions looking for this hidden pirates gold. One man actually lived on the island several years looking for it. None has ever been found. Captain Christian was sure that the pirates, being a lazy bunch, would never have gone into the island very far to bury their gold. He was certain it must be at Chatham Bay somewhere near the beach.

This is a photo of Chatham Bay on Cocos Island. This site and Wafer Bay are the two most accessible landing sites on the island. The beach is very rocky and it's were an ocean storm broke apart our only row boat during our 1970 expedition. Very dense jungle growth goes all the way down to the beach area.

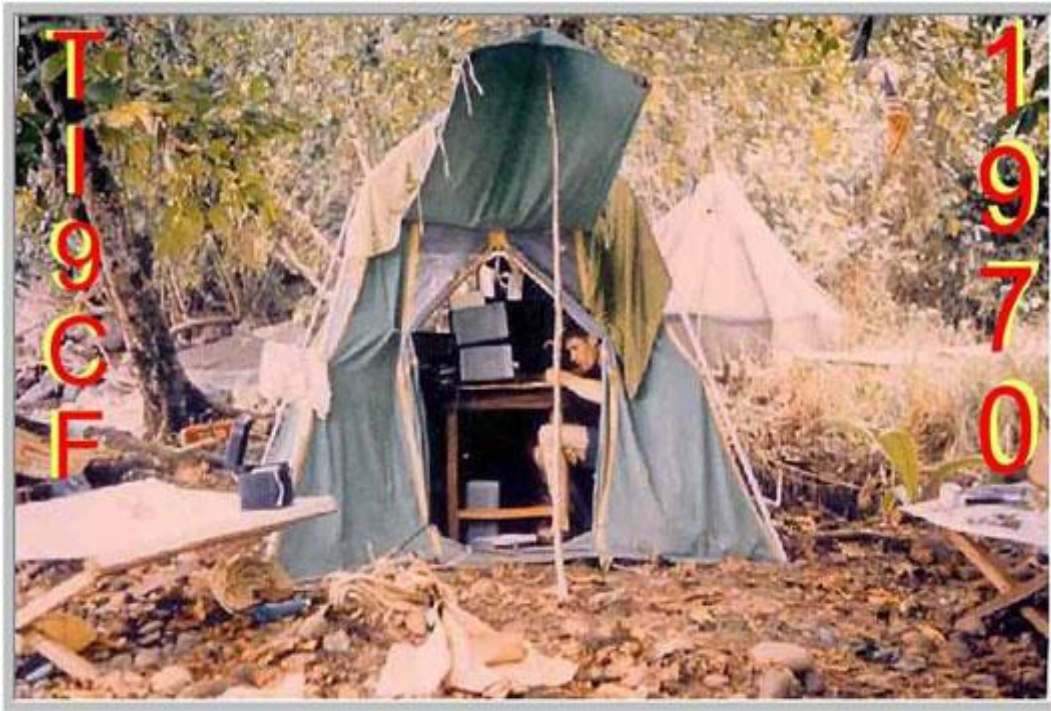


This was the ops site area just behind the beach area which is all rocks. The SSB and CW stations were about 100 feet to the left of where this photo was taken. You could use a machete all day and hardly cut out a large enough area for an ops site back then. This beach was completely flooded just hours after we landed. The tail end of the

storm later hit Cocos Island and broke upon these rocks the only life boat the group had. The tail end of the same storm washed one of the generator plants into the sea, damaging it. The torrential rains caused some of the radio equipment to be damaged and one of the multiband vertical antennas was broken and carried out to sea. We could see the shark fins swimming out about 150 away from the beach. It is a breeding grounds for a number of different types of sharks. About 4,000 QSO's were made during a four day period.



Don K6JGS getting ready to operate.



In 1971 there was another DXpedition to Cocos Island. This time it was W4VPD Enos Schera and Don Riebhoff K7CBZ, who accompanied Carlos, TI2CF and Jose TI2J.

Don Riebhoff later changed his callsign to K7ZZ. I helped get Don Riebhoff aboard this expedition. This one experience caused Don to be bitten by the bug for DXpeditions and he later went on to operate from Spratley Island, Saigon, Vietnam and Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

QSL, Photos & Story courtesy of W4PUL

http://hamgallery.com/qs1/country/Cocos_Island/ti9cf4.htm