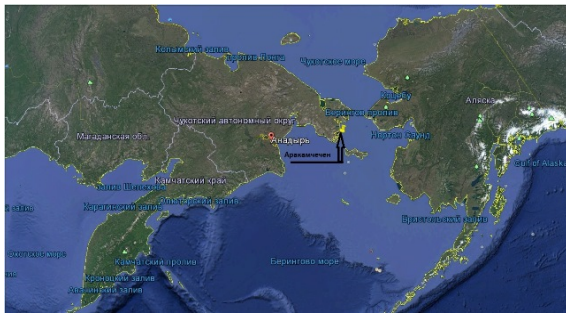


R71RRC Expedition or the third activation of Arakamchechen island

After a short run UTair's Boeing-767 easily took off from the runway of Anadyr' airport and shoot upwards into the fading air of Chukotka. Viktor and Alexander were coming back to Moscow on board of the plane after completion of the radio expedition. The beginning of it was as follows.....

In September of 2016 during a traditional international radio amateurs festival, which took place in Domodedovo, I came across Victor Slabodchikov UA3AKO. In April of 2016 Viktor, Andrej R9XC and the author of the report UA0KBG were operating on the air from an Alyumka island IOTA AS-92 under the call sign RT92KA. When free from the air Viktor told there was an idea floating around to activate Arakamchechen island, which is located in the Senyavin strait and was not presented on the air for long time.



It is worth to mention that the first HF activation of the island was done by Yury Sushkin ex. UA9OPA, today N3QQ, and Yury Sazhin UA9-145-625, an operator of a club radio station of Novosibirsk Electrotechnical Institute.

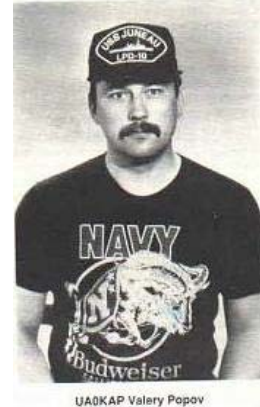
N3QQ Yury Sushkin

It all took place in the remote past 1990. About 1900 radio contacts were accomplished, the main part of them coming from the USA.

Valery Popov UA0KAP was the next radio amateur, operating from the island.

UA0KAP Valery Popov

Early March 1991 Valery went to the island by an off-road vehicle GAZ-71 and during four days was operating on the air using UA0KAP/A callsign. About 480 radio contacts were accomplished by him that time.



More than 25 years passed after Valery's expedition and it became obvious, that a new radio expedition should be organized. I agreed to participate and Viktor named the third member of our team. It turned out to be Alexander Ivanov RA3AV.

Unfortunately, Andrej R9XC wasn't able to participate because of objective reasons. So the team has been outlined and Viktor, in order not to lose time, began to fill up an application for a permit to visit border zone and to have a temporary callsign assigned, making and testing antennas at same time.

Alexander was busy with developing of the expedition's web site and cameras preparation. I had to deal with the logistic matters. The main part of the expedition luggage, Viktor sent to me from Moscow, should be received in Anadyr', where I live, and redirected to the Provideniya settlement.

Another rather important problem wasn't solved yet – a tent for autonomous survival under the conditions of cold Chukotka spring. I must thank Igor UA9KDF for his timely advise. Some time ago he was planning to activate a group of islands in the Arctic Ocean with a group of radio amateurs, and a special tent for low temperatures and strong winds has been manufactured for them due to their order.

Viktor ordered the same tent and lightweight folding beds. All this stuff has been sent to me and forwarded to Provideniya settlement. Looking back I have to say that the tent turned out as unnecessary item, because at the destination we discovered a deserted small house, in which the shack was arranged.

And finally, 3rd of April came. I picked up Viktor and Alexander at Anadyr' airport, accommodated them at a rented flat and on next morning we flew up by "ChukotAvia" AN-24 plane to Provideniya settlement. There Nikolaj V. Malkov (UA0KDJ) picked us up and offered us a room in his flat.



Nikolaj Malkov UA0KDJ

For power supply we used a mobile power station GEKO 2801, which was provided to us by local search-and-rescue group of the Ministry of Extraordinary Situations of Russia, Provideniya region. Having 2.8 KW of power from the station, we used continuously two transceivers K-3, transistor amplifier “Ameritron” (500 W) and my amplifier 2xGK-71 (700W). There was no one malfunction or breakdown in the power station operation, fuel consumption was also quite acceptable (10 l for 12 hours of operation). As a reserve power station we had a powerful diesel one, but it consumed enormous quantity of fuel. We had a barrel of diesel fuel for it, but the petrol power station was operating with no problem, so we didn’t need to use the reserved one.



Provideniya settlement view over the strait

Two local guys were invited as a driver and to accompany the expedition. Alexander A. Gust helped us as a driver of the hauler and Andrej V. Sobolev was driving a “Buran” snowmobile ahead of the hauler, exploring ice thickness and showing the way.

The next two days were spent to buy food, fuel for mobile power station and to load the off-road GTT type vehicle, which has been converted to a heavy full-track hauler.



The snowmobile driver Andrej and the hauler driver Alexander



Preparation of the hauler for the expedition

The snowmobile had a detached luggage trailer carrying necessary materials and equipment for the shack. Andrej knew the site very well and helped us a lot during the journey and later on arranging the lodgement-to be described later.

Management of National park “Beringiya” has rendered us a very serious support, Vladimir V. Bychkov and Gennady A. Paramonov as managers of National park “Beringiya” were supported us very seriously.

In March, a month before our arrival, Sobolev and Gust by Victor’s request visited Arakamchechen island to explore the ice conditions on the way to the island in Senyavin strait and to check if the deserted house in the northern part of the island could be used for the shack.

They’ve provided us with a mobile power station for the period of expedition, free of charge. Unfortunately, during the preliminary check Viktor discovered strong disturbance of the receiving signal and we had to avoid the station to be used. Also Nataliya I. Kaluzhina was helping us: she provided a detailed island map and, for safety reasons, contact phone numbers of hunters from Yanrakkynnota (the nearest settlement to the island) if a danger of beast attack arises.



Our future shack



UA0KBG and Alexander Gust, the driver, inside the hauler



The way from Provideniya settlement to Arakamchechen island (S = 80 km)

The results of the exploration were rather encouraging, the ice turned out to be thick enough for a heavy hauler. The house, despite a sight, having no windows neither doors, could be used as a shack.

The hauler loading took almost whole day, and at the final stage Viktor and Alexander mounted GPS tracker to the back door of the hauler, and it was worked out our route very well.

Well, almost everything was ready for the departure. On April 6th at two o'clock local Chukotka time Gust said "...Our Lord...save and guard us...", after crossing himself thrice he started with low gear the long route to the island, so far without Andrej accompanying at the snowmobile. He was waiting for us at some agreed place.

I called to Oleg' (UA0CID) mobile to report the start. We arranged ourselves in the hauler as following: I was sitting behind Gust at a regular chair, to the right side next to the engine hood Alexander (in front) and Viktor (behind Alexander) were sitting also at chairs.

We passed a crotch, Provideniya settlement on the left and continued to move through a pass toward Novoe Chaplino settlement. Visibility was good, but later it began snowing that worried our driver very much. Early in the morning we passed rare lights of the settlement and approached to the meeting point agreed with Andrej.

The snow was getting thicker, the driver Gust began to lose the way, often going aside and turning off shortly. Then the hauler stopped - the driver proposed to return to Provideniya and make another attempt when the snowstorm stop. It was a very uneasy moment, we could not accept it because it meant lost time and shorter staying at the island. Using strong expressions of rich Russian language Andrej managed to persuade our driver to keep moving ahead.

The snow was deep and friable, we were moving at the low gear, every 15-20 minutes Gust and then Alexander were checking the tracks from both sides - if we lose a single pin connecting tracks, the hauler would "take off the shoes" which means a catastrophe. As the driver said it was impossible to bring a torn track to working state under field conditions. So far it was OK. The hauler and the snow mobile stopped - our further way should go through the icy Senyavin strait. Taking into account that the winter at Chukotka turned out to be anomalously warm, we should be very careful regarding ice condition. While I was in the hauler, the others went to the ice and Andrej began to drill a hole checking the ice thickness. Then I saw Alexander taking the drill and rather quickly drilling another hole.



Measuring the thickness of the sea ice

Soon the guys returned to the hauler. It was OK to continue, the ice thickness turned out to be more than 90 cm - quite enough to keep running. After overcoming the sea strait by ice, we reached the shore of Arakamchechen island and kept moving, but still very slow as before, with average speed 12 km/h. A part of the way went through hills, therefore before the ascent we stopped to fix some hooks to the tracks.



Fixing special hooks to tracks

Before the evening, we reached a bank of a small river, unfortunately some distance to the left instead of proper place for crossing. Gust turned back, began to manoeuvre and suddenly.....a round oath and announcement: that's it, guys. Soon it became clear that the right board reduction gear went wrong, it must be replaced and for this we need to go back to Provideniya settlement.



The stop for the hauler repair

Due to the driver's estimation of spare parts delivery the repair would take 2-3 days. All together we made a decision to not waste time installing antennas at the place of the forced stop and operate from inside of the hauler. GP for 20m band had been installed, mobile power station was placed outside the hauler and we started with transceiver Elecraft K-3, amplifier «Ameritron» and computer power supply placed on the engine' housing.



R71RRC on the air

The notebook was placed at the Alexander's chair, powerful power supply for the amplifier -under the chair. The power and HF cables were fed through the upper hatch, the keyboard – on the lap, and everything was ready for the operation.



The amplifier and transceiver are ready for operation



Viktor called to Andrej (EU7A) via satellite phone and asked him to make a news announcement on the web site about beginning of operation of R71RRC on the air. In the morning of April 7th Gust and Andrej went to Provideniya settlement by the snowmobile with the trailer to bring the spare parts for the hauler, at meantime Viktor and Alexander were installing GP for 30m band.



30m band antenna

We kept operating on the air alternating each other. Alexander proposed me to have a rest, what I've accepted with a pleasure. Because of long sitting in the same pose my legs became numb and I had to move by arms, crawling inside the hauler like an alligator whose back legs got atrophy. But all these were small issues, it was most important to know that we were receiving answers, we were called up, for this one many inconveniences could be ignored. From time to time there was a strong noise on the air, up to S9 on all bands. During those periods we were able to receive strong signals only. On April 8th in the afternoon, when we were operating on air, sound of approaching snowmobiles became heard. Those were Gust and Andrej returning, and one more guy Alexander Paltarzhizky from Provideniya settlement, who offered his help, driving a snowmobile Ski-doo with a trailer, loaded by spare parts. We thanked the voluntary helper, soon he started back and we began to repair the hauler. We didn't manage to install the new board reduction gear before darkness and postponed the work till the next day.



Repair of the hauler

On the same day evening the sky got "blazed". We weren't happy with the Aurora Lights, because as a rule when it finished and gone, all bands are cease completely. On the morning of April 9th our fear got proved. The air was virginly clear on all bands. We had to proceed the repair of the hauler and it has been successfully finished it in the evening. We could go ahead. Viktor and Alexander quickly disassembled the antennas. Gust, Andrej and myself began to load our munitions into the hauler. We left the broken board reduction gear (weight of 100 kg) and some part of luggage at the place marking it by a landmark – all this would be taken on the way back. We started and soon came to the river's band in the right place, crossed it carefully and continued to run. At last we were at the destination: there was the house ("balok" in Chotka language), which was used some time ago for living and working by some inspectors, who were guarding walrus rookeries.



"Balok"

It had been in 80th of the previous century, later the walrus had found a new rookery, the house got deserted and was being in a sorry sight.



Cleaning of snow

Meanwhile Viktor installed GP for 30m band and joined us helping to clear a room from snow. The room was cleared, the windows were hammered in by plywood, the door was curtained by a large piece of tarpaulin.



It took several hours to warm the shack by a heater

A heater was activated, sometime later we brought in a table from the hauler, put on it the equipment, arranged chairs and at 20.25 UTC managed to make the first QSO at 30m CW -R71RRC is again on air!

On April 10th Viktor and Alexander installed 40 m GP and Andrej and Gust arranged a small stove in the shack. Everything necessary (a welder, a disc saw, five bags of coal, firewood) was in the hauler, thanks to farsighted guys Andrej and Alexander.

After that we could think about arranging a second working position. Andrej took a piece of chipboard from the hauler and made a table of it. The second K-3 was placed on it, next to it – amplifier 2xGK-71 and another operator may work.



Position №2

At the same time Viktor and Alexander installed 4SQ for 20m – this antenna had been very good at Al-yumka island and it proved our expectations here.



4SQ

20m

band

We've continued operating on air now having two working positions, myself and Alexander altering each other operating CW; Viktor was operating SSB only. He's got a real pile-up to Europe, number of QSO in the log was growing continuously. Later Viktor and Alexander let me to operate on air, while they began installing a Beverage receiving antenna for three directions - EU, JA and NA.

In the evening Viktor tried to estimate our possibilities to operate on 40 m band. He was not satisfied completely with the operation, probably because of effects of northern origin.



UA3AKO Viktor



Alexander RA3AV and Yury UA0KBG

After the pile-up on 20 m we were being answered not regularly on all bands, probably because our signals were being received hardly. We also had to strain our ears to receive signals of stations calling us. We had to feel deeply peculiarities of local propagation: signals of calling stations were very often not only "clinking and smeared", but also with a loss of some characters: receiving three times the same call sign and getting every time different characters. We had to reduce the speed of cw down to 60 symbols/min (20 wpm) and to repeat several times the call sign and report.

During the night of April 10th the wind changed its direction, the temperature in the room lowered significantly, despite the stove was fired continuously. But the main problem was as follows: a strong blast had broken a plastic rod of 40 m GP. We were lucky not to have storm winds, very frequent at this period, otherwise problems could be even worse.



In the morning, we began to repair the rod. The far-sighted Viktor had several pieces of duralumin angle. He made a rim, fixed it by sticky tape, we placed the mast on site and started the 40m operation. The SWR became a bit worse, but not too much. Later another problem arose: at my and Alexander's working position the K-3 got switched off, the transceiver power supply failed. Our attempts to bring it back to life had no effect, so we had to replace it by a spare one (from my reserve kit). Now it was OK, the transceiver was working.

We put an antenna for 17m but – silence, the same we had at 10m and 15m. Later we've been told, that at Chukotka there was no propagation on HF bands during the last two years. In total on 17m we made about 70 QSO, mainly with JA and just few of them – with UA0. When operating on the air we understood that we need to make our temporary shelter warmer. Gust and Alexander replaced the piece of the tarpaulin by one of doors we brought from Provideniya settlement.

At once it became warmer, for the first time during the operation on air we could take off sweaters and stay in a light clothes. We decided to convert second door we had into a bed, so that one of us could sleep right in the shack. Gust and Andrej managed to make the bed very quickly, but while we were busy operating on air, practical Gust brought from the hauler the kitchen utensils – gas stove, kettle, dishware, food so that instead of a sleeping berth we got a quite good kitchen table.



Kitchen table

We decided to leave everything as it is. Before we were having dinners in the hauler sitting on the floor in a Turkish way.

Later we paid a visit to a lighthouse located not far from us. Viktor made several pictures of GPS-navigator with the beacon's position data. A picture of our group with the flag of RRS (Russian Robinson Club) was also made. After that we returned to our house.



Lighthouse RLHA: RLA-034, WLOTA: LH-1604

Well, the 15th of April came – the completion day of operating on air. Viktor and Alexander began to disassemble antennas: first 40 m GP, next 17m GP, then Beverage antennas and after that – antenna for 30 m. At that time I continued to operate on 20m band. I had seldom answers with long intervals to my general call, then there was the last QSO with WB6JJJ. After that we disassembled 4SQ for 20m, packed the luggage into the hauler, cleaned the place carefully, put the wastes into plastic bags, brought by farsighted Viktor and in the evening started the way back.



The farewell picture UA0KBG, UA3AKO, RA3AV

At the place of first stop we picked up broken board reduction gear, but we decided not to move ahead: a thick fog and a restricted visibility forced us to stop to spend the night.

In the morning of April 16th we continued to move and in the midday we were at Gornoe lake. At the bank of it there was a grave of a Russian sailor, who had died there in the end of 19th century.



The note at the placard said: "Egor Gurin. A scribe from "Gajdamak" clipper". We stand silent for several minutes in memory of the seaman and after a short rest continued to move.



Again the same deep and friable snow, under which a water could be seen already.



The speed of the hauler was 7-12 km/h, temperature in the cabin more than +35 C. It was stuffy, the roar of the engine was deafening, we had to cry to hear each other, time was going distressfully slow.

At last about 23.00 on April 16th we came to a base of a search-and-rescue group of the Ministry of Extraordinary Situations of Russia, from where our way to the island had started and finished. We called to Nikolaj Malkov, he was not sleeping, waiting for us. All four sit into the trailer and Andrej driving "Buran" delivered us in some time to Nikolaj's home. We put ourselves in order and went to have a rest – not in sleeping bags, but at real sofas with furnishing.



Packing the expedition luggage

Next day we were busy with packing the stuff, then two days waiting in the Provideniya airport (non-flying weather, low clouds) and at least on April 20th we took off for Anadyr'. After arrival, I took the same rented flat for guys and on April 21st they started for Moscow on scheduled time. It is lamentably a bit, but everybody believed it had been not our last island.

In conclusion I would like to thank Nikolaj Malkov UA0KDJ. Our expedition would unlikely take place without his help. Also I want to express gratitude to people who were ready to help us any time. They are Andrej (EU7A), Oleg (UA0CID), Andrej (R9XC), Georgy (UA0IHZ), Igor (UA9KDF), Igor R0XA and many others. Thank you for the support and help! Also, we thank everybody who was calling us, who was paying interest and was following the expedition. Despite the two magnetic storms more than 6600 QSO were implemented.

BAND STATISTICS

40M – 960 qso
30M – 1732 qso
20M – 3842 qso
17M – 71 qso

CONTINENTAL STATISTICS

ASIA – 2775 qso = 42%
EU – 2745 qso = 41,6 %
NA – 925 qso = 14 %
OC – 132 qso = 2 %
SA – 26 qso = 0.4 %
AF – 2 qso = 0.03 %

We express gratitude to general sponsor of the expedition Mikhail Mogutov RL3AA, to radio amateur funds GDXF and IREF, which provided financial support, as well as individual sponsors from all the world, thanks to that the expedition to Arakamchechen island AS-071 became possible.

On behalf of the team – our warmest 73! Looking forward for new meetings on air!

The team of R71RRC

Edited for GDXF by Prof. Dr. Uwe Jaeger, DJ9HX