

VK5MAV/6 Australian IOTA - OC-266 – Viney Island

Departure, arrival, awakening ...

The expedition started ordinary. Preparing for it took away a lot of time and nerves, but you have read the previous article, or you may read if now you wish.

At 5:30 am on September 7th an SMS came to my phone reporting a taxi is approaching and located 1 km from the house. Jacket, shoes (+12 C in Adelaide) and 3 bags are already waiting. Farewell hugs with Larysa, kisses, and a taxi, carrying a 60 kg of luggage and me, went to the direction of Adelaide Airport. A farewell look from the airplane to the morning Adelaide - and went to sleep.



3.5 hours on a plane to Perth, 2 hours walking through the airport, and 2.5 hours prior to Broome passed quietly and sleepily in the chair.



Broome met me with luxurious airport and +35 C at noon local time.

Without any delay, slightly sweating, I got the luggage and walk about 20 meters to hire car company's window, where a car was waiting for me already. Derby can be reached by bus actually, but because of time schedule inconsistencies it would require another day lost for the radio (how naive I was planning this expedition).

As always, in spite of a paper map provided and GoogleMaps on the phone, I wander through the surrounding streets for half an hour, trying to get on the highway leading to the Derby. What to do, I can not be

so perfect - so topographical cretinism I have developed quite well.

But I got to the end, and, without losing time to stop, moved towards Derby - 220 km of travel. I have nothing to say about the trip, except impressions of termite mounds rocking on either side in huge amounts.



And occasionally encountered boabs. Occasionally - as this is the edge of their area. And of course - where Australia without road trains would be...





At dusk I finally rode into Derby, stopped at the first available supermarket (one of two there) and began to call Alan Gough, leader of DVMRG - Derby Volunteer Marine Rescue Group. I knew he was waiting, worried, because we had to get to the ocean very early in the morning.

Announced the arrival and where I am asked how to find him. He just advised to turn around and look at the service station across the street.

Hurray - he stood there, filling four jerry cans of petrol for me, what we did not agree! After shaking hands, officially met and talked, he went to the DVMRG base, leaving me to buy water, food, sunscreen and everything necessary, that made no sense to drag with me from Adelaide. Shopping wasn't long and in fulfilled car, I went there too. To get lost was no chance - the entire Derby stretches for ten kilometers along the main street, abutting the bay - but I did it. I turned right at the end of the road, but hesitated, turned around and drove on - immediately received a call from Alan, with a question - isn't my lights darterd erratically (it was dark)? Then - again, I turned around and drove up to a huge, 20 meters in height, metal hangar, where the rescue base is located.

Looking around at the place where I suspected to spend the night before shipping and drove the car inside, I was taken aback by Alan's categorical statement that I will not sleep here, but at his home. Well, who would refuse such warm hospitality?

Closing the hangar and strayed through the dark streets of Derby, 15 minutes later we arrived to Alan's family place. I was meet and greet by Alan's family - his wife, daughter and adorable granddaughter. Besides a delicious dinner, a separate, very comfortable room and shower have been offered. It was unexpected and therefore more enjoyable. In general, I've noticed - Australians often say little and do not promise much - but as a result you get a lot more than was agreed, expected or even dreamed. Time for radio stories elapsed quickly, and it was decided to go to bed at midnight - to get up at 4.30 in the morning, load on a boat and go.

I didn't sleep well, full of plans, with full mind, how everything will be assembled, what to do first, etc. We had a cup of coffee for a breakfast - and got to the base. Dinghy (motorboat) was stored directly in the hangar standing on the trailer, and Alan and I started to load bags and boxes right there.



Two crew members came in almost immediately - Barney the skipper and Morris, third guy Rembo the mechanic arrived a minute later. They did put the dinghy in the water to deliver everything to the boat. After 2 trips, with first rays of the sun everything was handled on the boat, which stands 800 meters from the shore (remember the height of the tide in the Derby to 12 meters!). We Dragged the dinghy onto the boat and the adventure began.

How real sea wolves run a boat ... At the chair - Morris. Rembo - left.

The travel took about 10 hours. Most of the time I was looking around - wild nature, multiple reefs and islands, bright blue water and fresh breeze took all my attention. Almost all the time the boat was weaving between the islands and reefs, so that 200 km in a straight line easily turned to around 250-300 km.



To the destination point of our trip – Viney Island – we came at around 3 pm, hottest time of the day. It was decided to go ashore at the same place where the previous 2004 expedition, on the rocky beach. No information about other possible locations were available, GoogleEarth is showing island with low resolution. And the crew didn't have time to cruise around the island to get something else.

Sounder displayed weird readings - even at a distance of 20-25 meters from the shore the depth was still about 70 meters. And it is at low tide. The crew was looking very carefully for a place where to drop anchor - and at the same time not get on the reefs. When found – we immediately began to launch the dinghy, unload on the shore and climb up the shore closer to a rock in the shade. Unfortunately, the boat could not stay for a long time - it was necessary to begin week-long patrol, and thus have the opportunity to throw me to the island and pick up a week later.

The process was not easy. The entire beach contains of well-rounded by water stones in size of a fist to a head, mixed with rounded pieces of coral with rigid needles. This sag at each step, it has to be done with caution, first see where you step. Beach is not smooth, about 30 degrees, and has ledges and stony waves; each of them is overcome with great difficulty. On the other hand, this was a plus, as at the hypothetical appearance of a crocodile it would make him almost unable to climb up. Good news to hear from people who live in the area for 20-30 years

Finally everything is at the beach after 3 dinghy trips 2 kW Honda generator, 80-litres Thermo box full of ice, all my luggage, 60 liters of water, 80 litres of petrol, et cetera.

We said goodbye, and the boat was disappeared in blue, leaving me to settle. As a precaution, I've been said that in any case the crew will contact me next day - or pass by, to make sure all is well.



Lying down in the shade of the rocks after unloading, with no energy left at all, I've realized my mistake immediately. Installation of antennas at the landing point does not make any sense - only South is open. The camp must be moved about 100 m to the side. And if I don't want to miss a day of operation it must be done



now - under the sun directly overhead, temperature +40C and the most worst thing - the rocks under feet.

It took me 2 hours with breaks, pouring water and tries to get breath back. 50+ sunscreen did not save my skin - the hands and feet were well scorched. Move everything to new place wasn't possible by hands. Some items were dragged by rocks, some left were are - like almost 100 kg ice box. That's how I looked immediately after the move. Feet were painful – looks like rocks were layed in special ornament – to get to most painful parts of feet. Stones were lying so that they bite into the softest part of a foot constantly. And shoes squishing with water after unload – it didn't make life easier as well. And I fell repeatedly slipped. I must say that the number of falls at this expedition only exceeded the number of falls in the last 10-15 years.

The sun was beginning to set (darkness as well as light are coming very quickly in the area), almost explosively. An hour and a half in the morning/evening - that's all. But at this time, as I understood it later, you are able at least do something not in the shade.

Therefore, dragging most of things, I've set up a tent and proceeded to antennas. It was decided in the evening to put on a dipole by Spiderbeam and 20 meters 3 elements VDA by RZ3FW.

It was fun. Firstly, to dig the anchor is almost impossible task – stones only. Scraping and throwing away rocks I was able to make some kind of a cone-like pit, put the anchor there with rocks on top – it does not hold the anchor. So I had to look around for the heaviest rocks, brought them together and erect the likeness of the pyramid for each of 3 anchors per mast.

Well - that's it. VSWR is excellent, VDA - 1.1 over the entire range, the dipole 1.1-1.3 on all bands.

But alas - the propagation is dead. 7-14-21 - just empty, not even Indonesian fishermen. So I took a photo to confirm the location and coordinates and sat up all night looking at the stars - they are very bright, very large - a completely unrealistic and even scary.

Periodically I tried to nap, but sleep would not come. Constantly I was reminded to myself - do not forget to ask to for a chair and table when boat come - sitting on plastic crates is very inconvenient way to operate CW. In the rush, we just forgot to unload them.



With the first sight of the sun the first pile of Japanese stations, followed by Americans came up on 20 m - loud, hear me fine. VDA works just fine. Somewhere after 1.5 hours spent on air 90 QSO have been made and propagation extinguished.

Deciding that all is well now and I need get some rest before the afternoon, I went to bed. I woke suddenly, around 40 minutes later, looked at the window of the tent, drawn by mozzy-net - and was stunned for a moment...



This is a knife. A good knife that has been chosen before purchasing on Internet, and approved later by rescuers. What's more - it's a great knife that Larisa simply forced me to buy before the trip. I resisted with all my strength - I already have a Swiss Army knife, the blade is there if I need to cut off something. Well, why would I need a weapon on an uninhabited island, where there are no animals? But evade failed, and on the last day before leaving I bought it - more to calm Larisa. But female can foresight - mysteriously, I was convinced of this more than once.

So back to the island. Sorry, more photos are not available for obvious reasons.

Deciding that all is running well now and I need to get some rest before the night, I went to bed. I woke up suddenly, after 40 minutes, looked out of the tent, drawn gauze - and was stunned for a moment ...

In the morning there was a high tide, and the water rose somewhere 3 metres up, completely hiding under stone waves on which we climbed yesterday, slipping and

swearing. However, the camp was safe. Only one small detail did attract attention - opposite the entrance to the tent at a distance of about 5-8 meters crocodile lying. The rising water has given him the opportunity to easily overcome the rocky slope.

It was not very long, 3.5 -4 metres (sorry, I can not say exactly how long - no measure tape measure at the moment). It troubling that the fall was ajar and legs slightly bent and thoughtful look directed to the tent. Later I was told by rescuers that the crocodiles come ashore to bask in the morning and pass through three stages - when they lie quite, when raised on legs, and when fully warmed up, begin to beat and tail spin, full of strength. And besides, they are very territorial, not nomads. So I was just unlucky (and rescuers didn't take it into account, considered crocs are unlikely here) that the landing place was next to a small lagoon.

I am not Crocodile Dundee, alas. And office work with computers and networks did not develop survival skills. Therefore, the only thing I did more or less consciously - pulled out a knife hanging on my hip (how uncomfortable it was to sleep, but conversations at home and on the boat made me show "silly caution") - and cut wall tent opposite the crocodile side in two movements .

I rolled out of the tent - and then I do not remember anything. My mind woke back up while I was holding a screwdriver in my hand (who would say - why?), About a hundred meters away from the tent, among the small thorns, with shorts torn to shreds by the knees and below and well scratched shins.

However, I do not remember run on the rocks or fear, probably, the adrenaline is not only excelled, but also beat a fountain, pouring all around.

I sat there, wondering for a long time. However, I realized that it is necessary in any case to go back to the tent, as the sunshine became stronger and stronger and I didn't have any water with me. Once absent-mindedly, I did not bother to take water at parting with a crocodile... The t-shirt had been wrapped around my head and I began to tear at shorts' leg to shreds - jogging barefoot on rocks and dry grass responded in the feet, not letting me walk freely but even stand up to them.



Somehow wrapped my feet by remains of shorts, I hobbled back cautiously, trying my best to see if there is still a crocodile.

But he left without saying goodbye. Dear, dear ... But I think, he promised to return. Who may refuse a free invitation to three-star Michelin restaurant suddenly appeared under your nose?

Poured on and drunk about 5 liters of water, I began to think what to do next. Tent doesn't exist anymore - it is cut through and looks like I've broke supporting poles when rolled out. Still in the excitement, I remember that I didn't make any selfies yet - and did it first thing, picking up my hat that was lying near.



All radio equipment is not damaged – I was too lazy to install it under the tent, intending to make it in the morning.



The only thing I could do in this situation - to cover the transceiver / laptop by remains of the tent, so they wouldn't fry melt in the sun, crawl into the shadow of the rock and recover, and that was done. It was so great, that the box with ice and the part of water remained under a rock. However, there was one inconvenience - satellite phone network has not been seen from under the rock and in the attempts to contact I had to come out to the scorching sunshine - practically on my knees as feet were not given any chance to stand up to them.



Here under this rock I spent almost all day, absorbing water and thinking what to do next.

The decision to stay was rejected immediately - there is still a four night of stay, high tide will come back for sure, I need to sleep sometimes, without a tent protection from the sun during the day is impossible. And most importantly - a crocodile is still there. And I will be totally defenseless at night with headphones and a bit dazzled by laptop screen.

I had 2 options only – to try contact rescuers for immediate evacuation or wait for their promised visit.

Time was passing very slowly, with only entertainment to do regular watering water of the chest and back and periodical treatment of bruises. I was slightly amused by permanent removal of flies, coming to the fresh blood, and throwing stones in all directions. Also, the

time passed in an attempts to stop shaking, despite the heat - jitters became weaker slowly, leaving periodic involuntary laughter, nausea and weakness of the hands and feet. Lack of internet was bothering as well - office plankton, which I am, painfully tolerate it. But at those moments I realized the appeal of adventure tourism, especially for white-collars - all those sudden issues did wash out routine, boring mood and I want to live so strongly now!

As time went on, the night was approaching slowly. Doesn't matter – how carefully I was listening ocean and looking there - there was not a hint of the boat. Darkness was approaching, and boats don't cruise in this area at night - a very big chance to get on the reefs.

Rescue, recovery, a new attempt

As time went on, night was approaching slowly. I've peered and listened to the ocean – but there was not a hint of the boat. Darkness was approaching, and boats are not going at night in these places – a very high chance to get on the reefs.

When I realized that the time is running away fast and crawled out from under the rocks to catch the network - the phone came to life. These were the rescuers who are interested in how I was doing.

As a result, they reported that they are about 20 miles away from me, and in an hour should be able to come back to Viney. Waiting is not delayed for too long, as it was necessary to pack everything, disassemble the antenna and bring everything I can closer to the water. The sun had not been so strong anymore, and by the time they appear on the horizon, everything except a box with ice, was at the surf. The meet and greet process was marred by the fact that they were forced to cut off the anchor stuck in the coral. All stuff was handled again back to the boat and Viney disappeared astern.



Rescuers a such rescuers – they've began intensive therapy immediately - spraying liquid stuff with medicinal odor on my legs and forced to have beer to relieve stress.

At dusk we came into a place closely surrounded by the islands where the public and moored buoy was installed.

Despite the rather strong breeze outside, everything was absolute quiet here. The evening was spent on talks about crocs, especially salt-water ones, with a demonstration of the living one sitting in the water not far away. It turned out even more interesting in the dark to use a powerful torch for an observation.. If you see two red eye points - this is it. Unfortunately, the camera phone in the dark wasn't able to take more than just blurred spots. I didn't sleep well on the deck that night - crocodiles were seen by me everywhere - in each corner and every box. The next morning the owner of this place did let me to take a photo of him.



This and the next day all three crew members – Barney, Morris and Rembo - dedicated time to the job and me, and I'm very grateful to them, because I didn't have any time for self-pity.

We were in a weird and unusual places, two of them are most memorable for me.

You may try to imagine a secluded bay, hidden from the eye. To get there a boat must go through long and winding path between the islands to the bay. It's simply pandemonium (by local standards) of boats there. On the black pontoon, sitting in the water near big fishing boat, crocodiles like to come up and warm themselves.



All boats have been attracted here by a source of clean drinking water, a strong flow from inside the rock, the opportunity to relax in the pool and meet unusual people. Years ago it was main supply of the drinking water for all mines scattered around by surrounding islands and the relaxation place for miners. But mines are closed now, the center fell into disrepair and was inhabited by squatters-hippie.



They support some order here for several years now, up to 15 people sometime, from a day to up to a year, but only two people - Simon and his partner are living here permanently. Oddly enough, over time they even made a contract with the management body to live here legally and free of charge. Let's climb the remains of steps, and walk along the paths ...



And Voila! We are at full-landscaped site, complete with, however, quite specific smell, reminiscent of Bob Marley, reggae music and specific smoke...



Nice to see the meeting of two old friends - Barney did help Simon with the construction, and still constantly visit the place. After traditional Aussie greetings we are going to the pool, where about an hour had been spent in the fresh water.





But all good things are ending at certain moment and it's time for us to go.



At the evening we come back to the same mooring. Crocodiles do not haunt me at every corner anymore, but they are very near - just put hand or foot into the water. And another creature - lemon shark - not too big here, no teeth, but attacking a prey suddenly and sucking it outright. Sounds funny, but not less dangerous, all her palate is like coarse sandpaper, and the bone is exposed very quickly.



Next morning begins with a fishing method unknown to me - but it's just milk defrost trick if the milk in the fridge turned into a monolith.

On this day, thanks guys, I got to one more secluded and "not for everyone" place. It's a small freshwater lake, filled by healing water, flowing out of the rock. Once upon a time few people dead here, and now everyone who visits this place, leave something there. And yes, after swimming there many of my cuts and bruises have been healed.

In addition, this day was fishing day - simple, nothing special - a one and a half of hour, more than 30 kilos of fish. Naturally, all the fish has been checked for minimum size and a small ones have been released. On arrival at the port the catch will be carefully checked by fishery inspection and violators face considerable fines. Although I was compelled to participate several times - but alas, I am not a fisherman. And the secret thought forced to take care of the left hand (I do CW by left hand, writing / working on the computer by right at same time - very helpful).



Fresh fish is a great meal. The dinner, cooked by Rembo, was absolutely amazing and huge, putting all of us to a quiet and relaxed mood. And then I step out with my speech.

"It's very nice and everything is absolutely wonderful. Honestly, I fell in love with West Kimberley. But the main purpose of my visit is ham radio. You see – I'm fine. May I be returned to Viney Island for the remaining 2 nights - but at another beach. After some silence and few beers guys started to talk about remnants of fuel and their work plans, and finished with not very audible Barney's "Need to think".

After that they all went to sleep on the roof of the cabin, and I was stepping across the deck, occasionally highlighting the red eyes in the water and waiting for the morning.

Finally, back to air, and back home

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After that they all went to sleep on the roof of the cabin, and I was stepping across the deck, occasionally highlighting the red eyes in the water and waiting for the morning.

The sun has risen on time, we did sip morning coffee joking, and the boat went somewhere.

It was bit awkward to ask again, and all I could do was occasionally look at the GPS data on my phone.

The boat was running between islands, turning frequently, and clear picture did not come up. However, after about an hour I realized that we are slowly but surely going in the direction of Viney island. Plucking up some courage, I did ask, is it true, and got the answer - "Well, you did wanted it."



Hooray ! (But in a whisper now to not jinx everything.) Viney was rose up from the ocean, appeared over horizon slowly. I couldn't distinguish it remotely - there are too many islands, and they are very similar. And even same island looks unfamiliar from slightly different angle.

The boat was approaching a bit closer and move along, away from the first landing place. It made a circle around the island and slowed down. This time, the rescuers did not rely on my knowledge of the photos of the previous expedition landing site, and choose it themselves. If I knew that the place does exist from the very beginning, whole story became much shorter.

Secluded cove, no lagoons, open to south, almost closed to north, west and east are closed, no stones – just myriads of small seashells on the beach.

Besides, this place has been visited by someone, and may be regularly, and it was another confirmation of convenience and safety.

Boulders and bushes were piling up aside the beach, as if specially placed there to set up a camp. The validity of the place was confirmed by few sooty pots and parcel of canvas lying in the bushes, as well as a pair of old bent pipe of unknown origin. Pipes were found very handy. The tent was cut earlier and could not be restored. Rescuers were caring to remove debris during the evacuation. Remains of the tent were stretched on pipes and tied to the bushes, giving protection from the sun for me and hardware, and given the relatively constant strong breeze the shelter was providing quite comfortable coolness.

Unfortunately, my camera phone drank ocean water (I forgot to take it out of my pocket during the landing, jumping from a boat into the water), and a only few photos and videos have been made by a borrowed camera.



The canopy is stretched; all stuff unloaded, 12 m mast with a dipole erected, the generator runs - and rescuers are gone.

The silence, only breeze is flapping canopy. And total loneliness.

Well - it's time to go on air. A nuisances came up to the scene – the laptop wasn't able to survive long roasting sun on the site of the first landing and died.



However for such possible case I had a stack of paper and a pen. When darkness fell, it became clear that there is one more problem - when we unloaded the boat a lantern was abandoned aboard.

So I had to fill the logbook for two nights by moonlight. Well, moon was almost full and the deathly light lit up all around.

And then - and then it all began again, pileup, no propagation, and again, and again.

Propagation was change constantly - on the first night it was irresistible European pileup, the second - a very high background noise with a suddenly appearing with 599 report stations from everywhere - North America, Europe, South America, Asia. One the most interesting and memorable contacts was one with K0AP. He did make a QSO within 15 minutes only theoretical "window" to me.



As the tent didn't exist actually, the constant breeze at night did make life uncomfortable and push me to wrap a sleeping bag around my body, so I represented the rather unusual object. However, there was no one to see it.

But I wasn't alone there, it was found out on the first night. From the moment of landing I had constant feeling that something is constantly biting making every bite very itchy. But what it is I had not a clue – no flying objects, nothing. When pile-up was finished I decided to sleep couple of hours. Sleep sitting on a chair is not a best sleep at all, and I decided to lay on the bare ground - the same bite feeling was strengthened. When first rays of the sun woke me up, I looked at my hands and feet and recalled immediately "sand fleas". Yes, it was them and a lot of them. They are microscopic, biting hard, and ubiquitous.

But there was nothing to do, insect repellent didn't help against them and I had to endure for two days. Water pouring over limbs did help, but for few minutes only, and at daytime.

That's how my arms and legs looked on arrival to home. And it's a condition after medical help I got at Derby.



Second night is gone, Barney did come up on dinghy early in the morning, and said that I have 2 hours to dismantle and pack everything. The boat is not too far away and will come to pick me up.

Last QSOs, process of antenna putting down, packaging process have been finished. Waiting time started.



The boat came up 3-4 hours later, when I did start to worry. It turned out that all this time they tried to release the anchor again stuck in the corals, but without any success, and had to cut the rope again. Nothing else could be done - it's a feature of navigation in the local waters.



The rest is not that interesting - loading on the boat and straight ride without incidents back home to Derby, where we arrived in the afternoon.

The boat was banked far away from the shore (remember, 12 metres high tide at Derby), and expedition stuff came back to the rescue base, I suddenly realized that I'm in need of a shower and a bed. And one more thing - I need a pair of any shoes desperately. During the second landing on the island my sneakers felt apart, rotted inside from water and destroyed outside by rugged surfaces.

I didn't walk much at the island, but any step at Derby was tricky, on really hot ground barefoot. My flight home with no shoes would look bit weird as well. Therefore, immediately after the medical treatment of flea bites on the base, I crawled into rented car patiently waiting for me, and went to search for any shoe store. It wasn't difficult - "see the first shop on the left after the first turn." After a joyful purchase flip flops I sighed sweetly, and after driving a couple of blocks, stopped at the Derby Lodge - one of three local hotels, but the best ... and the nearest.

It was plenty of available rooms and after shower and some sleep in air-conditioned space I came out for a

walk in night. I was surprised to know that the hotel belongs to ... Morris, with whom we spent so much time together on this expedition (met him in the evening in the area and had a talk). The night went out quickly, and I went to Broome, left a room key in special box, to not miss the plane.

Morning drive was perfect ... but after that I had to wait long hours at Broome airport. I was living on GMT and as such all different time zones mixed up on my mind. I was completely confused, arriving at the airport 4 hours earlier.

But the island did not want to let me go - flight to Perth was deferred for 2 hours later, making me (and few other passengers) to miss connection flight from Perth to Adelaide. Finally I had to spend a night at Perth hotel.

But everything comes to an end - and here I am at home - resting, getting a treatment and planning next IOTA adventure.

In this expedition I understood the main thing - no matter what statistics say - radio amateur community is alive. And it is not sealed on DX, contests, number of confirmed countries/islands only. When the expedition started and disappeared from the air for 2 days suddenly, people around the world began to look for me, worrying and offering help, calling sat phone number and sending SMS. Hams from Russia, Belorussia, Australia, USA. I do not think that I would be able to recover so easily and decide to continue without their support. Thank you very much to everyone who remembered me. And when it was over, I started to receive support from around the world, as the expedition budget jumped well over planned costs. Amateur Radio - lives, doesn't matter that we think about it sometimes.

I am very grateful to all - I cannot even list all call signs here, it would take one or two pages. I hope I will be able to say personal "thank you" to everyone sending cards for contacts.

I would like to express my warmest gratitude to the main supporter - German DX Foundation (GDXF). The donation offered was generous and most important, it was provided before the expedition. Thank you for the trust and support.

And Most Wanted DX site, Spiderbeam and IT9EJW QSL Printing Services did make everything to make the expedition happen.

Here I say goodbye to everyone, but not forever - just until the next expedition! You may help to make it happen. Donations are more than welcome to PayPal account: au47sk@hotmail.com

With deepest respect and gratitude,
Andy VK5MAV.