

Norfolk 2019 – story written by Jacek VK9NE

Just after Friedrichshafen Hamfest, I started to think about a new DXpeditions. During the last ten years I used to activate several South Pacific countries alone or with some friends. If I exclude from the list countries already visited or horrendously expensive, there was not so many countries left to be chosen with reasonable air access. The choice fell on Norfolk Island. Although it is activated often but still remaining interesting on low bands. I have contacted ham friends in VK who used to visit the island to help me choose a location. The Pacific Palms bungalow on the northern shore of Norfolk has already hosted DXpeditions several times. It is located 300 hundred meters from a high cliff facing NE. I invited to the expedition Mek SP7VC and Martin SP5ES to join my dxpedition. Mek is an experienced dxman and keen expeditioner (working all bands including microwaves), with Martin I spent one month activating Tokelau a few years ago. Both had limited vacation opportunities therefore we decided on an unusual solution. Although our team consisted of three operators, on the island there were only two of them at a time. Mek was active 10 days, Martin a week, and I remained on the island the entire time. That decision implicated several logistic problems concerning transport of equipment but finally we solved all of them. We applied then for separate callsigns for everybody. Priceless help on several stages of preparations has been offered by Luke VK3HJ.



From left to right: Jacek SP5EAQ (VK9NE), Mek SP7VC (VK9NC), and Martin SP5ES (VK9NG)

DXpedition started 15th October, when the first operators VK9NE (SP5EAQ) and VK9NC (SP7VC) left Warsaw airport. We flew through Doha to Sydney, where (after spending a night) we boarded a plane flying to Norfolk. After three-hour flight we collected the luggage and realized that the owner of Pacific Palms is not at the airport as was promised but instead, there was a small van rented at our expense for the entire stay while the contract for renting a bungalow included a car in the price. It turned out later that the offer of the agent had not been updated for many years and now the car was not in the offer anymore. That made our situation not comfortable. On Norfolk Island there are no taxis or public transport and our fairly remote location meant that there would be serious problems with food supply and uploading logs (2G obsolete network does not provide any Internet access and the net is

available only via WiFi hot spots or via very expensive permanent lines). All our problems were solved after four days when we got an old rusty Toyota and a local hot-spot was installed by a local Telkom.

Our antennas have been installed just after arrival. The lawn in front of the building was not large and it was surrounded by an electric fence preventing animals to enter. The limited area for antennas forced us to optimization. We abandoned phased antennas for lower bands and finally we based on a set of six! monoband vertical antennas, two deltas for 40 and 30m, and a short 40m beverage toward Europe.



Spiderbeam 12 m mast supporting one of deltas

Mek VK9NC used to spend most of the time on FT-8 that allowed him to make a lot of contacts also on low bands with Europe. The most effective were 40 and 30m bands; 20, 18, and 15m were hardly predictable as well as 80m. 160m was very difficult, affected by QRN and 12 and 10m had very short openings mostly toward JA. I (VK9NE) was working exclusively on SSB. Both we took part in WWDX SSB Contest. Raw scores show that Mek got 2nd place in Oceania on 40m HP (5th in the World) and Jacek 2nd place in Oceania on 20m HP. Both stations were ranked in non-assisted category.



300 m from our bungalow was endless Pacific facing North

After ten days of operation Mek was replaced by Martin VK9NG (SP5ES). Martin was expected to work mostly CW but he spent a lot of time also on digital modes (FT-8 including F/H mode and FT-4). Finally DXpedition made more than thirteen thousand QSOs on all bands allowing a lot of ATNOs to increase their DXCC scores. Conditions (with exception of 40/30m) were bad and not predictable easily (especially during daylight). The lack of information through the Internet in the first days of operation significantly hindered to notice our weak signals in Europe during this period. Essentially we used to control all HF bands nearly 24h each day.



Sleepless nights on low bands

The team would like to thank all friends and sponsors for significant help during the preparations. The help of Website master SP5UAF and on-line log software designer SP7DQR was greatly appreciated. SP7SP kindly offered a power amplifier and a prototype of a portable antenna tuner he had designed.