

Next destination: Tokelau ZK3A by Hrane YT1AD

Only when you start something new then you know where the beginning is!



ZK3A-QSL

I was thinking for some time on how to start this story: when I started planning this DXpedition.

After a long time, I understood that the beginning of DXpedition is not this year, not last year but the year when I celebrated 50 years of my amateur radio hobby, which for me is in October 1969, when I was in the eighth grade of elementary school in my home village of Vitanovac and I visited the radio club Kraljevo YU1DKL. At that moment after this visit I understood, that my hobby will be amateur radio. And this passion was much more than a hobby for me, as my profession is in a related field of radio communication.

Now direction Tokelau ZK3A, for many amateur radio around the world, this is a most wanted country in different mode or band of operation. Why direction to Tokelau? Reason is, I am sitting at 03:00 in the morning, local time, to start to write this story when my 18 friends are sleeping on the boat Mataliki, which is the official boat of the country Tokelau.



Leader and Co-leader YT1AD and UT5UY

The boat is cutting and jumping through the ocean waves taking us to our final destination, the country of Tokelau which is 8 degrees Latitude and 171 degrees Longitude and it is under the suzerainty of New Zealand. This country is in the tropical area and it never experiences cold temperature and for us that live in the northern hemisphere, the tropical areas are a symbol of warm ocean and tropical vacation paradise. I like tropical areas a lot. In the 1900 I used to go skiing in my country and that's when I then decided that for me the tropical, warm areas are what I call paradise.

Tokelau is a country made up of 3 separate atolls: Atafu, Nukunonu and Fakaofu. In addition, there are also hundreds of other small uninhabited islands.

Now on the main target. During the presentation of our last DXpedition 9M0W to Spratly Islands in 2018, on KPI- Kikjevski Polytechnic University, to my Ukrainian friends I have met in person, Alex UT5UY, after many prior radio contacts. He is one of the main directors of RigExpert who is now also one of our main sponsors. We spoke about our wonderful hobby and DXpeditioning.

After our conversation he proposed a DXpedition to the island of Tokelau which he visited in 2011, after having boat trouble in the way to Kiribati.

The boat had to stop for 4 days on the Tokelau island of Nukunonu for repair before returning to Apia, Samoa. During this short stay in Nukunonu, he and his friends used the call ZK3X to make radio contacts. After thinking about it for a short period of time I accepted his proposal. It was for me a challenge but in the same time a big responsibility to organize this DXpedition.

We started preparations and I named 2 co-leaders for the DXpedition: UTSUY Alex for logistics because it is not easy to coordinate 19 people, and UROMC for the technical side. We quickly formed our team. We had a lot of requests from hams to join the team but we were limited to a maximum 19 team members.

During a science conference in Auckland, New Zealand where I participated with my colleague Dr. S. Panic, I've made the decision to go to Fiji and Samoa to visit my old friend Atsu 5W1SA which stores at his home in Apia one of my containers with ham radio equipment that we used in prior DXpeditions.

Atsu, thank you so much for your support for my DXpeditions over the years!



VK3FY – Chris

We arrived in Apia, Samoa at hotel Millennia. After a short rest we visited the representative office of the Tokelau government in Apia.

We were interested to find out how to obtain an amateur radio license for Tokelau. After a few of inquiries, I was a bit disappointed as there was no definite answer from our meetings. But I was able to obtain the telephone number of Teletok director in Fakaofu, who is the person responsible for all amateur licenses in Tokelau. I was in the hotel room number 31. I remember as if it is today. I attempted to call Mr. Tealofi but there was no answer. I called again after 30 min and Mr. Tealofi, the CEO of Teletok picked up the phone. I presented myself and he asked details about amateur radio license. He quietly listened to my story and then asked me where am I. I am in Apia, hotel Millennia in room 31. He responded that he is in room 27 at the same hotel. How happy I was in that instance, to be at the right time at the right moment!

We agreed to meet over dinner in the restaurant in front of the hotel. It was a nice dinner with lobster salad and wine. After dinner, all worked out easy and fast. We quickly found common language and he invited me to visit Tokelau, his office and people of Tokelau and obtain the desired amateur radio license. After this successful meeting I quickly reached out to my Ukrainian friends to give them the good news. The whole team was very happy and the DXpedition planning started the next day.

In the beginning of May 2019, Dusko ZL3WW and I, travelled to the island of Fakaofu in Tokelau and stopped by the Teletok office.

The Teletok office run by Mr. Tealofi and his deputy Mr. Bosco was well organized and received us very nicely. They provided us with all the information we needed regarding transportation, traveling, food, accommodation and other technical details that we needed for our DXpedition. At the end of the meeting we received our amateur radio license with the callsign ZK3A valid from May 10 to December 31, 2019. The cost of the license was NZ\$100.

During our return trip to Apia, from Fakaofu, we made short visits to the other 2 atolls: Nukunonu and Atafu and that gave us a nice overview of this small country but with large territorial waters.

On arrival in Apia, Duslo ZL3WW and I checked and prepared our antenna systems (stored at Atsu's house) for our upcoming October 2019 Tokelau DXpedition.

As I already mentioned, 19 persons, that love DXpeditions, very good amateur radio operators: UT5UY, UR0MC, RW7K, US0KW, R7KW, UT8IO, SV2BFN, ZI3WW, VK3FY, VK3GK, K6VHF, WD5COV, KO8SCA, N7QT, VE7NY, PY2DX, UR9QQ, RX3APM and YT1AV began preparations for activity from ZK3A radio station.

Most of the logistical details were done by the Ukrainian and Russian operators. On August 13 and 14 we organized meeting in Zaporozhie. Our host was our friend UT7QF. After returning from Ukraine I was very satisfied that all the main issues have been resolved and we were ready to start our adventure.

Pacific life is slow going and there are always issues that come up so in the beginning of September 2019, I've made the decision, to send and advance team of 3 team members to Tokelau by the boat Kalopaga. 2 boat seats for Adrian KO8SCA and Dusko ZI3WW were confirmed immediately but Rob N7QT was on waiting list for departure September 24, 2019. But again, unexpectedly on September 23, day before departure of the advance team, we received good news. The government of Tokelau, scheduled a second boat named Mateliky for destination Tokelau, together with boat Kapopaga. This boat travelled directly to Fakaofu and so, all 3 team members arrived in Fakaofu 2 days before the schedule.

During the preparations for the DXpedition, MR. Tealofi, CEO of Teletok, asked our team to make a radio amateur equipment donation not only for the Island of Fakaofu where we will operate from, but also for the other 2 islands Nukunonu ZK3NT and Atafu ZK3AT.

Main part of our team arrived in Samoa on September 29. It was Sunday and all our team was tired after a long trip but very excited to start the new adventure.

The next day we presented our passports to obtain the Tokelau entry permit and left our luggage for inspection, but again we run into problems. According to the schedule, Mataliki must first go to Atafu, then to Nukununu and last to Fakaofu, which meant we will have an additional 2 days of operating.

Again, the team was very happy and satisfied with the outcome. After dinner, organized in Serbian style: fish, fish soup and beer our team went to bed. The next day, on Tuesday, was a very important day. After 06:00AM wake up time, 15 min breakfast and 15 min walking to the port, we were ready for immigration and customs control. We received our passports with the entry permit for Tokelau and then we stepped on to the boat Mataliki. At 08:00AM we finally started sailing.



Celebrate fishing day in Fakaofu

On the boat ride, no more whiskey and vodka. Everyone drinking coffee and waiting for the sunrise (the arrival time) and the first view of our target island: Fakaofu.

During our trip the sea was relatively calm but some of our team members had sea sickness. Slowly, we started seeing the red light of the sun in the horizon, showing up from the East. All team is now on the upper deck of the boat, taking pictures and preparing to disembark.

After arriving on the island, we immediately received our luggage and divided our team in 2 groups. 10 team members stayed on the main island of Fale and the other 9 team members left by small boat to another island where the Teletok office is located, about 2 miles away from the main island.

The advance team already installed the largest and the more complex antenna systems. On arrival the main team just installed delta loop for 160M hang from a cellphone tower on the island and 7 element beam for 6M. Roman was responsible for our EME contacts and he really was happy like a small child every time he was able to make an EME contact.

Sometimes, propagation was on our side and we were able to be in the air with 8 stations simultaneously in different bands and modes. Having teams spread on 2 different islands, about 2Km apart, gave us the opportunity to work multiples modes in the same band in the same time.

Like on any DXpedition there were some technical problems but the team was able to overcome them successfully. After an 8 day operation, we bring in our pocket more than 50K QSOs, as a gift to the amateur radio community.



Education, new OPs from ZK3

We were active from 1.8MHz to 50MHz in different modes: CW, SSB, RTTY, FT8, EME and SSTV. Our team also enjoyed swimming and fishing in one of the most beautiful waters in the world.

In a few occasions, our menu contained sashimi and lobster. Every day, we also had available to drink fresh coconut milk.

We planned to be on the island until Friday October 11, 2019 but in life not everything works according to a set schedule. On Wednesday October 9, 2019 at 10:00 we received the unexpected and unfortunate news from MS. Taitai: one child from island Nukunonu was ill and the boat Mataliki immediately changed the schedule in order to take this sick child urgently to Apia.

We had 2 solutions: pack everything in 3 hours to be on that boat leaving urgently or stay on the island for an additional 10 days. But for our team there was really no choice at all as we all have flight reservations for the trip home so the decision was taken to leave immediately. We will arrive in Apia 2 days ahead of the schedule.

We were happy with all commentaries and support from the amateur radio on all social media.

Thank you to all amateur radio operators around the world for listening and calling us patiently in the big pileups.

As Team leader, I must emphasize professional and honest attitude of all Ukraine and Russian amateurs and recommend this HAMS for any DX expedition in future.

And finally, this DXpedition is also a personal present, as I am celebrating 50 years of ham radio.