TX5EU – French Polynesia Austral: DXpedition to Raivavae Island

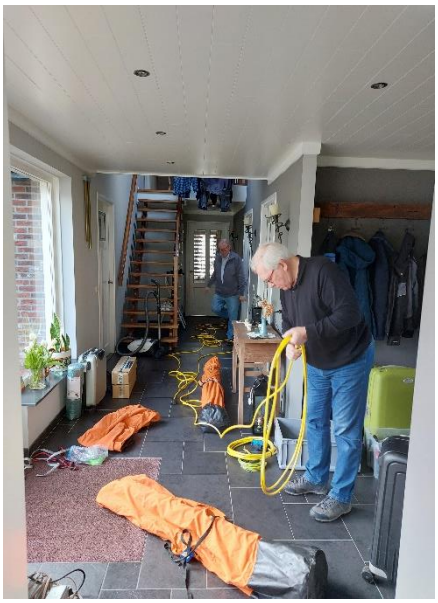
The idea for our next DXpedition was born during a relaxed moment at Hamfest 2025 in Friedrichshafen. While enjoying a fine German beer, our team began discussing potential destinations. Several options were mentioned, but the Austral Islands of French Polynesia quickly became our preferred choice. A few weeks later, our DXpedition leader, Günter DL2AWG, presented two concrete proposals: Raivavae or Tubuai.

Preparation and Planning

After careful research, we selected the Tama Resort on Raivavae as our base of operations. The resort had previously hosted several DXpedition teams, and after contacting operators from those groups, we received a wealth of valuable information.

Our plan was to activate Raivavae as **TX5EU** in March 2026.

The team consisted of Gerben PG5M, Ernö DK2AMM, Evert PA2KW, Ronald PA3EWP, Rainer DL2AMD and Günter DL2AWG.



Each operator had specific responsibilities. By the time preparations were complete, flights and accommodation were booked, the license was requested, sponsorship requests were sent to DX clubs, the website was online, and the equipment list was finalized.

Photo left: Gerben packing the 220V extension cable. Photo right: Ronald and Evert packing the fiber masts.

The Journey to the Austral Islands

Our journey began in Paris. The Dutch operators travelled by car and the German operators by train to Orly Airport.

From there, we flew to San Francisco for a short refueling stop before continuing to Papeete (Tahiti). After spending one day in Papeete, we boarded an early-morning flight at 06:00 for the two-hour hop to Raivavae.

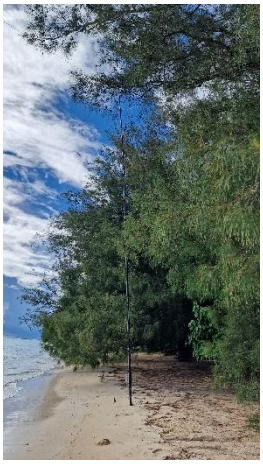
Station Setup and Equipment

Our operator lineup provided an excellent balance across all modes, allowing us to form three teams of two operators. We assembled three identical stations, each built around an Elecraft K3 paired with an SPE 1.3K amplifier, supported by bandpass filters and 4O3A high-power filters for 15 and 40 meters. A spare HAL1200 amplifier and a spare K3 were also available.

The Dutch team had pre-assembled and tested the entire station configuration, using the same proven setup deployed during our previous DXpedition to Swains Island (W8S).

Space on the beach was limited, which prevented us from operating on 160 meters. Instead, we focused on the higher bands — possibly one of the last opportunities to work Europe from the Pacific on 10 and 12 meters.



Photos above: 30m VDA, 20m VDA, 10m VDA and 80m vertical

Our antenna farm included VDAs for 10 - 30 meter, a monoband vertical for 40 meter, a vertical for 80/60 meter and one multiband DX Commander. With approximately 200 meters of beach available — much of it public — we carefully planned the layout. By the end of the first day, most antennas were operational, and Evert PA2KW had the shack ready for our first QSOs.

Connectivity Challenges

We used N1MM+ for logging and networked the laptops via WiFi. Initially, we had no internet access. A SIM card provided by our hosts did not work, so on Monday morning we visited the local post office and purchased a SIM from the island's provider. Once installed in our 4G router, Club Log's livestream and online services were fully operational.

Exploring Raivavae

We took one day to tour the island. Raivavae is volcanic, rising to 437 meters at Mount Hiro. About 900 people live on the island, which covers roughly 16 km^2 and is surrounded by a lagoon dotted with 28 small islets. A large mountain dominates the center, making long-path operation to Europe impossible.

The island is also home to a traditional **tiki**, a carved figure symbolizing power, wisdom, and the spiritual heritage of the Ma'ohi culture.

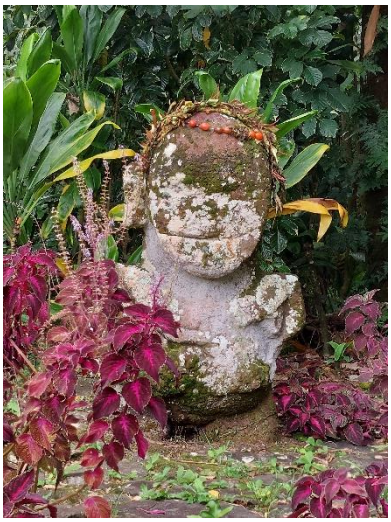


Photo: Tiki half god half men

Propagation: A Rollercoaster

Propagation was excellent during the first days, but conditions deteriorated quickly. Higher bands to Northern Europe became nearly impossible. Although conditions improved slightly toward the end, long periods of near-zero propagation forced us to run all three stations on FT8 — even then, QSOs were scarce.

A visit from the Local Priest

Two days into the operation, we received complaints from the local priest. We had placed two antennas on the grounds of the community center — a location approved by our host — but the priest objected. Despite our explanations and even offering a donation to the church, he remained opposed. To avoid further conflict, we moved both antennas to our own property.

Amplifier Failures

Technical issues soon followed. One SPE amplifier began reducing power during transmission, dropping from 500 watts to 200 watts before failing completely. We replaced it with our spare amplifier, which then developed problems with the 10/12-meter bandpass filter two days later, making it unusable on the higher bands.

DL2AWG and PG5M in action.

Our setup, 3 radio's 3 amplifiers.

Storms, Rain, and Relentless Wind

Propagation wasn't our only challenge. Heavy rain and five days of strong winds — peaking at force 8 — battered our antennas. Over the course of the expedition, we repaired antennas more than 30 times. Fortunately, nothing was permanently damaged.

Photo: Repairing the 15m VDA at low tide.

The 30-meter VDA collapsed between two bungalows, and the 80-meter vertical fell into nearby trees. Extracting the 18-meter fiberglass mast without breaking it was extremely difficult. We managed only two nights of operation on 80 meters and one night on 60 meters. Two days before departure, we dismantled both antennas.

Final Days and Results

We stopped operating on Tuesday morning and began packing. One station continued running digital modes until the very end. By sunset, everything was packed and ready for our departure the next morning.

Photos above: Günter DL2AWG (team leader), Ernö DK2AMM and Rainer DL2AMD

Despite the challenges, the results exceeded expectations. We logged approximately **59,000 QSOs** — about one-third more than planned. Mode distribution matched our goals:

- **52% digital**
- **31% CW**
- **17% SSB**

The continental breakdown was also encouraging:

- **26.6% Europe**
- **33.3% Asia**
- **34.6% North America**

In total we made 1.145 QSO's with Germany, the best bands for Germany were 15 and 20 meter. We were active for 11 days and made +/- 5.300 QSO's a day. We worked 17.209 unique calls.
We hope many operators got an all-time new one or at least a few new band slots.

Looking Ahead

We thoroughly enjoyed our time on Raivavae and already have ideas to improve our station setup for future destinations. Even after many years of experience with DXpedition, there is always room to refine and innovate.

We extend our sincere thanks to all European DX clubs and individual sponsors whose support made this expedition possible. Our hosts, Eleonore and Dennis White of the Tama Resort, provided outstanding hospitality throughout our stay.

QSL is via our manager **DL2AWG**. More information is available on our website: **https://tx5eu-2026.topdx.de/**

On behalf of the entire TX5EU team, **Ronald, PA3EWP**