



Wythall Radio Club Wythall Contest Group



G1WAC G4WAC G7WAC G0WRC M5W

g1wac@wythallradioclub.co.uk

<http://www.wythallradioclub.co.uk>

Supplement to July-August 2010 Newsletter

Ramsey Island Dxpedition—IOTA 2009 MC0SHL—MW9W

The plan is hatched

This was planned over the ILLW weekend in July 2008, Rob (MW0RLJ) had had a idea as to our first attempt at a dxpedition; Ramsey Island (EU-124 for IOTA), not a rare island but one that would raise a lot of interest for the island chasers around the world as it had not been activated (officially) for a few years.

The trio of Rob, Tim (M0URX) and Ant (MW0JZE) had done a reconnaissance trip the day previous and had made contact with the islands warden, Greg, who was most interested in what we were proposing. And so the planning started.

October 2008 was when we next got together and discussed further the planning, this was at the CQWW Phone contest of that year. We planned and chose the date to do the expedition to coincide with the IOTA (Islands On The Air) contest run by the Radio Society of Great Britain in August 2009.

Planning and permission to land

Rob was the main man in the planning of the trip. He made contact with all the necessary parties which included the RSPB and Pembrokeshire Coast National Parks. We also had to take everything with us, and I don't just mean radios and antennas. Everything from water to generators and fuel, including the radios and personal items of the operators, had to be taken over to the island – though we later found out that there was a fresh water supply from a natural spring on the island available and safe to use and drink (though not the same standards as we get from the water suppliers at home). We were given the use of some old farm buildings that the RSPB use for any guests and researchers staying on the island, this included



the use of a small cooker and 3 rooms for sleeping eating and the shack.

Negotiations with Thousand Islands Expeditions, the people who have permission to land on the island with passengers, and the RNLI to use their lift to get all the equipment from the top of the cliff to the launch ramp were also done by Rob and his partner Jane – who was to be the 7th member of the team – and finally the land owner near to the launch site to allow us to park the van and car away from the general public and in a safe place. Chris at this time was getting permission from the company he works for, Fraikin, to use one of their vans to ship the equipment from his and Tim's home in the Midlands to the farm and the boats.

As a group we have our own Yahoo forum and many e-mails were exchanged on what equipment we would need to how many bottles of beer would be needed (always a major part of dxpeditions). In the end we decided that boxes of red wine would be the best thing to take along, with any bottled beer to be part of each individuals choice and allowance.

Antennas were a major discussion with Chris seeking sponsorship from a major antenna manufacturer in the USA who agreed to go

halves on the costs of the supply of a tri-band beam if the UK importer would offer their support and go the other half on one of these antennas. Numerous e-mails to the importer and no replies, so Ant decided to build two G3TXQ Broad Band Hexbeams, which in tests from his home out performed a tri-band beam offered. We then decided that wire dipoles for 40M and 80M would be easier to erect and carry than the verticals we had at the farm, and as we were also looking to activate the WAB square we also thought these better



for inter UK working. Amps would be the 3 Acom 1000's of Ant's, Rob and Oliver (MW0JRX). And the transceivers would be the Elecraft K3's of Ant and Oliver along with Tim's Yaesu FT2000. With all the logistics and radios in place it was then time



to look at all the other equipment we would need.

We knew that there would be no mains electricity so we had to take generators and fuel with us, and these had to be big enough to power the radios and amps for the whole period we would be on the island. Ant, Rob and Charles came up with the generators and fuel cans, and the fuel costs would be split between each of the team members. Food was then the next consideration and Jane said she would do the cooking for us – and a big thank you from all the boys here for her culinary expertise – and she prepared some meals before we left. We had cuppa soups, Pot Noodles and sandwiches (meat kept in a cool box) for lunches, and some fantastic main meals. All was now in place and we awaited the day to sail.

Ramsey Island

Ramsey Island lies half a mile from the St David's Peninsula, the most westerly point of Wales. This magnificent island is dominated by the rocky peaks of Carnllundain and Carnsgubor, whilst the two small islands, Ynys Cantwr and Ynys Bery lie to the south.

Owned and managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) the island provides a home for nesting chough, peregrine falcons and several species of seabirds. Its vegetation includes important stretches of heath land and maritime grassland which are among the few truly unmodified semi-natural habitats in Britain. Little surprise that associated with these habitats are many species of plant and invertebrate that are national rarities. The breeding colony of grey seals is the largest in south west Britain, with up to 300 seal pups being born each year at the back of the cave systems and on the small beaches around the shore. It is an island rich in legend dating



back to the establishment of early Christian cells or chapels, first in AD 186 by Devanus or St Tyfanog as he was also known, and later by

St Justinian. The existence of Bronze Age cairns and probable Iron Age

field systems dates the influence of farming back some 5000 years.

Our own research found that the island had not officially been on the air for

almost 30 years, though a few individuals had activated it unofficially and only in short sessions in this time. But as a IOTA group EU-124 was not that rare within Europe and America, but we found that it was No18 most wanted in Japan and Asia, so we decided to try and work this path as much as possible. Charles is also the UK Co-ordinator for the World Flora Fauna award scheme and the island **was** another new area to be activated for this award. This, we knew, would also generate interest in the activation.

Travel and logistics

As is usual for any of the MCOSHL team events we all travel down to Rob's farm at least one day before so we can get together for a meal and a few drinks, and this was no exception to the rule. Charles (M00XO) also operated from the farm for a few days activating the WFF award scheme and he plenty of interest.

An inventory was made and last minute shopping was done to get the necessary



food stuff, treats and other last minute items – the fuel would be bought on the way to the boat for safety more than anything. The team then had a relaxing evening enjoying a good meal cooked by Jane, along with some of Jane's friends, where a few glasses of wine were enjoyed.

On the Thursday morning the boys were up and loading the van ready to go to the boat and on to the island. The attendant at the fuel station was rather surprised when we pulled up, opened the rear doors and proceeded to fill numerous Jerry Cans with a mixture of diesel and petrol – not in the same can may I add but in separate ones. And we had to have 2 attempts as the fuel pumps cut off at £100.00 delivery. All this was necessary to last for a week and to make



sure we had enough in case we had to stay on the island through adverse weather. Arriving at the embarkation point we soon realised this was not going to be a stroll in the park to get the team and all equipment down to the dock, load and then unload the boat and eventually up to the barns on the island that were to be our home for the week.

The first problem was getting the equipment down to the Lifeboat Station at St Justinians. Luckily, and with great sigh of relief from the team, Rob had managed to get permission to use the lifeboat stations venicular lift. This was a cart on rail tracks with a winch in a shed at the top of the slope. We also had assistance from members of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Parks with moving the



BBC documentary about the under sea life of the island – something that a member of the public said we were doing after a brief explanation of amateur radio and that we were hoping to raise awareness of the hobby! Still Charles' impression of David Attenbrough had me convinced.

As with on the mainland it was not

gear from the van to the lift, and then from the bottom of the lift to the launch ramp of the St Justinians/St Davids Lifeboat station where we were to board the boat to take across Ramsey Sound to the island. When all the gear had been unloaded we moved the van to a secure area on private land where it would be safe for or stay on the island.

Island landing

As none of the team had ever taken part in this type of activation, or not on this size at least, we were all looking forward to getting across the water and on to the island. Some of the team are not good sailors and were apprehensive whilst we waited our turn for the boat and tides to be favourable for our loading and landing. This time was spent relaxing with all the gear on the slipway of the lifeboat station, and in this time enjoying the August sunshine. When the time came to load the boat it went without a hitch and we were on our way.

The 8 minute crossing passed without incidence, and we were soon being greeted by Greg, Lisa and their team of RSPB volunteers on Ramsey Island. Again the work began unloading all the equipment, food and fuel. There was a short climb to a staging point where we had to wait for the last of the visitors to board their boats back to the mainland. A number asked questions on what we were about and I am sure there must be someone somewhere waiting for a

going to be easy to get all the kit from the quayside up to the barn. But Rob had again come up trumps with arranging with Greg for the use of the Quad and trailer to move the kit up the steep path – I don't think any of us fancied carrying a Acom 1000 up that climb. We loaded the quad and split into 2 teams, one to go up to the barns and start to unload, and the other to move the kit to the trailer loading point. Another smooth operation and within the hour we were all sat having our first drink on the island.

Everyone of the team members said the same thing when we were all up at the barn – "What a perfect place to be to play radio!" The views were breathtaking, and each one of us has a memory of that first moment of us all being on the island and looking back to the mainland. It was said at this time that we all wanted to buy the island and move there permanently, but I guess every DXpeditioner has said this at some point.

MC0SHL hits the air.

As this was the middle of summer we had plenty of daylight hours left to start getting the antennas and radios set up. We first built the 2 Hexbeams and got them up and working, it was then the 40M and 80M dipoles turn. Whilst the 2 dipoles were easily erected by 2 team members we split again and had Tim, Oli and Ant setting up the radios and laptops, Chris and Charles setting up the 40M dipole, and Rob prepared the mast and anchor areas for the 80M dipole. By darkness we were on the air, and running our first pile ups from Ramsey Island (EU-124) under the club call MC0SHL. As the evening wore on the guys all started to drift off to their beds, leaving Tim and Oliver on the air.

As dawn broke the next day Charles was up and calling CQ, and before long we were all up and getting excited at the

prospect of exploring and activating the island. Though EU-124 is not a rare IOTA – we had gone to activate the island for the ward scheme after all – it has not been officially activated for a number of years and we know that IOTA chaser like to work each island in the island group. The first task of the day was to finish off and get the stations networked, especially the contest logging software, which is where we hit our first problem. None of us had thought about this, especially as we had been OK the previous year in CQWW, but we found that N1MM and Vista do not like networking together easily enough. We tried to download WinTest4 as this is what Chris uses and has paid for the licence but the server was down most of the day. We had taken some mobile broadband internet units with us which we found invaluable to get messages on to the cluster and to friends back home.

Oli spent almost all day Friday trying to get the network sorted, but in the end we decided to leave it and get on and operate. After all this is what we had come for. Chris tried to get some help from the WinTest forum, but again that was down and he was still trying with one hour to go before the contest on Saturday. The Hexbeams performed excellently, and we were even able to get on the same band with 2 signals – this was done as a test for mult chasing in the contest. The pile ups did not thin out all weekend, what a fun time we were going to have.

Around mid afternoon on the Friday we had a visit from Greg and Lisa, the RSPB warden and his wife, inviting us down to their house for a Bar-B-Que. As we had also brought along some meat etc so we could have one we jumped at the chance. This would give us the opportunity to interact with the warden and the RSPB volunteers. Charles became the chef, and what a top





BBQ chef he is. The meat was cooked to perfection. Rob and Ant also took this as an opportunity to film the bitches to show the ferocity of the sea and how quickly it runs through the Ramsey Sound. These will be uploaded on to the Gallery on the website.

As the evening wore on and the sun went down it could be seen that there was going to be a spectacular sunset, so a group of us decided to take a walk across to the western side of the island to witness this. This is where we suffered our first casualty. Ant was walking along and put his foot into what can only be described as a nesting hole of one of the many species of bird around the island. He went over quite badly and was in a lot of pain. Rather than carrying on and making it worse Chris and Ant slowly made their way back to the Barns. When we arrived back we took a look at his ankle, this had swollen considerably and looked like a serious sprain. When Ant got back home he went to his local hospital and it was found he had cracked and chipped one of his bones and he was in a cast for a number of weeks after the trip.



IOTA Contest.

The Saturday morning was a little frenetic. Oli had been having problems getting the computers to network with N1MM, so we had a team meeting and decided to get on the air with 2 stations using MW9W and one using MC0SHL and put in check logs. This meant we would be able to have independent numbers for each station.

We got on the air that morning and still the pile ups came, we targeted the Pacific and Japan area as we had promised and asked Europe to stand by, which they duly did so thank you gentlemen, and worked a few from that region. But as soon as the contest start time arrived we called "CQ Contest and the pileup just did not slow down. If EU-124 is not rare in Europe it was not reflected in the number of callers we had that day. Even over night it was almost none stop on the low bands, with many calling for multiple band slots.

The team members who were not on the air used the time to explore the island and just

relax, especially as this was also a holiday from work for them. The scenery and wildlife on the island is spectacular, with the birds who had been nesting now raising their young and the young deer starting to show we had some fantastic encounters. The deer were harder to spot than any of the other animals, one minute you could look into the heath land and see 2 or 3 and within seconds they had vanished, but keep still and quiet long enough and one would show its head above the bracken and heather.

Oli is a fantastic photographer and he went for a walk with his camera one day. Most of the scenic photos and the wildlife and flora photos were taken by him.

Time to leave.

Before long the time came for us to pack away all the equipment and start for home. We took down the antennas and packed all the radios away. The food and fuel we had left was donated to the RSPB team, and we made sure we had left the island as we had found it, taking away only memories and photographs.

We also took a little time to thank Greg and his team for their hospitality and help over the week. This gave Greg the chance to make all of us members of the RSPB, which was part of the agreement and rules of us being allowed on the island, but as we all felt this was a worthwhile cause and we are all lovers of British wildlife it was felt a cost worth spending.

The equipment was then loaded back on the quad, and taken to the loading area for the boat. At this point we were aware of the weather, as we had been watching a front of wind and rain come in from the west. This would have caused swells too big and dangerous for us to sail off the island. The boat arrived and we loaded it up. Said our farewells to the island team and set off back to the mainland and the climb up the cliff to the van and car.

Will and the Coastal Path volunteers were once again on hand to help us ship the equipment off the boat and to the lift. This was done with military precision once more, and again we had the use of the lift. 2 teams one at the bottom loading and one at the top moving from lift to van soon had the van loaded with all the gear and we were on our way to Rob's farm for a relaxing evening and a well needed shower.

Thanks and Results.

As this was our first attempt as a group at putting on an expedition of this type we learned a hell of a lot. We firstly need to make things easier to transport, we had some trays that we put food and essentials in which stacked nicely – Rob is going to try and get some more of these on his travels – and were easy to transport, some waterproof and protective cases for other equipment, making sure all computer networks are set

up and working beforehand – Oli is looking for 3 laptops we can use just for this type of operation (donations welcome) – and we have decided what software we will use for all contests and logging.

We have had a special 4 sided QSL card printed for this operation and Tim, M0URX, our QSL manager has been busy despatching. All logs have been loaded on to the ARRL Logbook of the World and to club log (<http://www.clublog.org>). The Check logs went in to the IOTA contest committee and hopefully many of you will be able to get EU-124 credited via the upload on the IOTA website.

As a team we must express our thanks to the many people who made this trip possible. Firstly I know all the boys want to thank Rob and Jane for the hard work they did in getting the whole thing off the ground, even though they will not admit it they both made many phone calls and a few trips to St Davids, the necessary bodies, and to Greg on the island to get the permission in place to actually land on the island before we even got on the air.

To Will and Ainsley, wardens for Pembrokeshire National Park coastal footpath and their groups of volunteers who helped with the loading and unloading of the gear from Van to boat and back again. Thanks also to Martin Hall of WF Hall and Sons for allowing us to use his land to park the van and car over the week, what a fantastic DX QTH you have Martin. We must also thank John from the Lifeboat Station for unlocking the gates so we could actually get in to the area to unload, and to all at St Justinians and St Davids Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) lifeboat station for allowing us to use the launch ramp for loading and unloading of the boats. To the guys from Thousand Islands boat trips for shipping us safely to and from the island. I must also thank my boss, Peter Findlay, Dave Thompson the manager at Fraikin Oldbury depot and all the management team at Fraikin for allowing the team to use a van for the week to transport all our equipment not only from the Midlands but from the farm and Ant's.

And finally a big thank you from all of us to Greg and Lisa Morgan for all their help on

the island and with allowing the team to visit and use the barns for the week. Along with the volunteers on the island it would not have been possible to carry out this operation and we look forward to next year (2010) when we will once again be activating Ramsey Island, (EU-124) in the IOTA contest.

MW9W EU-124 Ramsey Island 24 hours
IOTA Contest 2291 QSO's 105 DXCC
MC0SHL EU-124 before and after contest. 23

– 27 July 2977 QSO's 127 DXCC
Total 5268 QSOs
Pick of the bunch of the stations worked from Ramsey are: V26B Antigua, ZD8LP Ascension Island, BG4AHD China, HC8A Galapagos Island, HR3/WB6BFZ Honduras, XE3N Mexico, YN2N Nicaragua, A43LH Oman, V47M St Kitts, 3DA0OK Swaziland.

Tim M0URX
Chris G1VDP



Ramsey Island – Ynys Dewi A Magical Island

CQ Zone 14 • ITU Zone 27

MC0SHL
Strumble Head DX & Contest Group

MW9W

Ramsey Island • Ynys Dewi
IOTA EU-124
Wales