3D2JK expedition to Lakeba Island, OC-095 (April 16-22, 2026)

Final report by Jacek SP5APW

Flights to Lakeba depart from Suva-Nausori domestic airport once a week, using a nineteen-seat, twin-engine Vikings DHC-6 Series 400 aircraft. This low frequency of flights necessitates a stay on the island that is several full weeks long. Unfortunately, the limited total duration of my entire trip, hampered to approximately three weeks, meant I couldn't plan a stay on Lakeba longer than one week. I chose the beginning of April as the departure date, right after Easter, which allowed me to return home before the long May Day weekend.

Concerned about seat availability on the small plane, I bought my Suva-Lakeba flight tickets well in advance. I also researched the optimal route from Poland to Fiji. At that stage it seemed to be best to fly directly from Warsaw to Tokyo, and then from Tokyo to Nadi.

In addition to planning my itinerary, I also searched for accommodation options on the island. Unfortunately, the initial search wasn't very promising. Every contact I could find online proved useless. Either no one responded to my messages, or the phone number turned out to be wrong. Eventually, however, I found "Hooked on Lakeba." This contact was a perfect match. The person on the other end of WhatsApp was very helpful and responsive. I was quickly able to finalize the details of the accommodation and obtain approval for the installation of antennas. One problem was that only a five-room cottage was available for rent on the dates I requested, which obviously significantly increased the cost of accommodation.

In parallel with handling travel and accommodation logistics, I began detailed selection and planning for radio equipment and antennas. I was going to travel with my wife. So, I had to fit within the maximum limit of two 15-kilogram bags per person on the Suva-Lakeba route. This required a real balancing act and meticulous preparation of the equipment specifications. To ensure the expedition's success, I couldn't assume we would be able to take any additional pieces of luggage with us. If our baggage isn’t on the same flight, it will be sent a week later, exactly on the day of our return flight. An additional complication was the need to bring a spare radio, power supply, and computer. Failure of any of these devices would mean the expedition would collapse.

Antenna bag

To meet the DHC-6's baggage requirements while keeping baggage to a minimum number of bags on long-haul flights, I packed the antennas in two small bags, each weighing about 15 kg. These bags were then placed inside a larger bag; one used for golf equipment. This way, I could divide one bag into two smaller ones without repacking. The same thing happened with the second bag. From the large 30 kg suitcase containing the amplifier, power supplies, cables, and other small accessories, as well as our personal belongings, I simply removed the latter and packed them into a smaller suitcase, which had previously been considered carry-on luggage on an international flight.

Just when it seemed that all the details of the expedition were settled and under control, the US attacked Iran. This armed conflict in the Middle East temporarily closed the possibility of flying through Japan. Many flights through the Middle East were canceled. Those that were later reopened were heavily booked, and ticket prices skyrocketed. For a moment, I was threatened

DHC-6 on the Lakeba airport

Cottage on the island

3D2JK during SSB operation

with canceling the entire expedition. Fortunately, I managed to arrange an alternative flight westward, via Los Angeles.

We departed for Lakeba on the morning of April 16, landing on the island after an hour-long flight. Adi, our local guide, was waiting for us at the airport. The cottage we were staying in wasn't a five-room unit, as previously announced, but rather a smaller one, consisting of a living room with a large table for my radio equipment, two bedrooms, and a bathroom. Throughout our stay on the island, Adi took great care of our comfort and ensured that we lacked nothing. This generous hospitality made up for the lack of additional, unnecessary bedrooms.

Electricity on the island was only available during the day, from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., with a two-hour break in the early afternoon. This required the use of a generator during the remaining hours. As agreed with Adi, the generator was turned on just after 10 p.m. and ran until the early morning hours, powering our cottage. Furthermore, Adi, upon hearing from me that the cellular internet was poor, installed her Starlink terminal in front of our cottage, giving me full access to the network.

Propagation conditions were quite challenging. While the first two days were relatively good with an average K-factor of 0.5, the following four days saw an average K-factor of 3.5, occasionally reaching 5.0. This limited SSB activity and forced operation primarily in FT8 mode. The worst propagation occurred over northwestern Europe, including the United Kingdom.

While operating as **3D2JK** from Lakeba Island (OC-095), I managed to make a total of 3,308 contacts with 2,286 (69.1%) unique callsigns from 86 DXCCs. All contacts were made on five bands: 20, 17, 15, 12, and 6 meters. In addition to working at SSB and FT8, I also made several scheduled CW QSOs. My activity on the air lasted 6 days and 5 hours, from April 16, 03:50 UTC to April 22, 09:10.

Six meters propagation appeared in the evenings between 6:00 and 10:00 UTC towards Japan, Korea, and the east coast of China. The best opening of the 50 MHz band occurred on April 18, when I made 155 FT8 contacts in 4 hours, at times operating with a large pileup.

The Lakeba community carefully cultivates old Fijian traditions. Staying on the island and interacting with its inhabitants requires the chief's permission. This permission is obtained during the welcoming **sevu sevu** ceremony. During this ceremony, a gift of a kilogram of **kava** root must be presented to the chief. One element of the ceremony also involves drinking a beverage made from this root.

The current chief of the island, and indeed of the entire Lau archipelago, who bears the title of **Tui Nayau**, is Ratu Tevita Uluilakeba Mara, son of the previous chief who died in 2004 and was the first prime minister in the history of independent Fiji. Unfortunately, we were unable to meet him in person. He had left Lakeba just before our arrival, attending the funeral of his brother-in-law, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, former president and speaker of parliament. So, our sevu sevu, for which we dressed in local **sulu**, a type of skirt, took place a few days late, and one of his relatives led the ceremony in the chief's stead.

The radio equipment I used consisted of an Icom IC-7300 transceiver and a spare Yaesu FT-857D. I also used a small RM MLA300 amplifier, purchased especially for the trip. Powering these devices was a small and lightweight 13.8 V/60 A switching power supply, weighing just over a kilogram. This power supply was a converted "hot plug" power supply from a server. I also brought a spare unit of this device in case it failed.

RM MLA300 in operation

The weight constraints I mentioned earlier forced me to forgo bringing a four-element Yagi antenna for 50 MHz. Instead, I brought a previously tried-and-true Buddipole™ antenna from home, from which I could easily build a three-element Yagi. The Buddipole™ comes with a lightweight, collapsible telescopic mast. The entire setup, including the guy wires, weighs less than 6 kg. The antenna for the shortwave bands, from 10 to 20 m, was the BuddiHEX™. This is a portable hexbeam antenna also manufactured by Buddipole™. Because the antenna's structural components had taken some abuse during my previous trips, thanks to the kindness and sponsorship of the company's owner, Chris W6HFP, I was equipped with the necessary spare antenna components for this expedition. For the BuddiHEX™ I used a standard 5 m long aluminum push-up mast.

The weather during my stay on Lakeba was quite good. Rain fell sporadically. It was also dry before we left, which allowed me to dismantle the antennas in comfort. We flew back to Suva around noon on April 22. I had to be packed in the morning. Therefore, I needed to dismantle the hexbeam the previous evening. Finally, the only thing left to dismantle was the 50 MHz antenna and I used the evening of April 21 to make about twenty additional QSOs on that band.

My last night on Lakeba was spent without any "radio duty," so I got the best sleep I have had in a week. In the morning, I folded the Buddipole, and after breakfast, we were driven to the airport. A Fiji Airways employee who had arrived on the same flight handled the check-in process. He already had printed boarding passes and baggage tags with him. So, check-in consisted of weighing the bags and the passengers, along with their carry-on luggage. This time, there were about ten passengers on the plane, slightly more than on the flight to Lakeba, when there were only six people on board.

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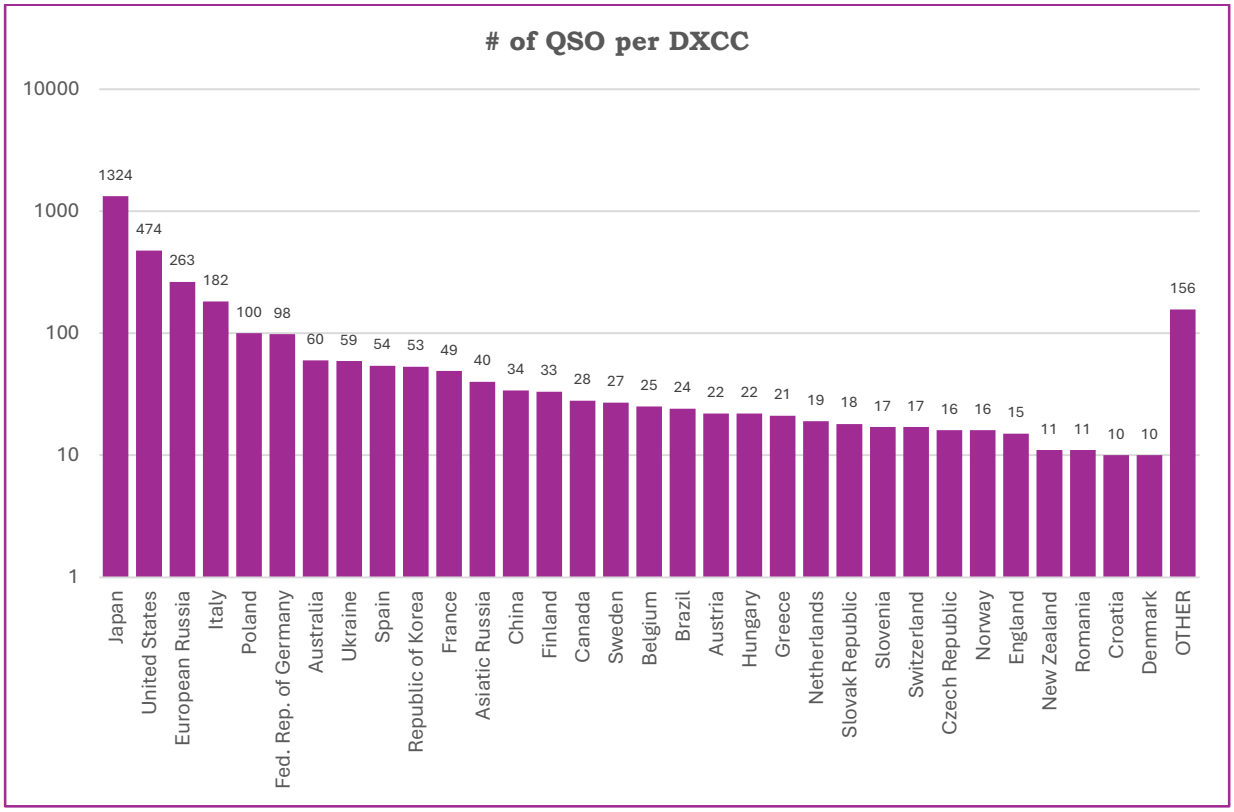
3D2JK (OC-095) expedition statistics

# of 3D2JK (OC-095) QSOs						
By mode and band						
	20m	17m	15m	12m	6m	Total
CW	0	3	0	0	0	**3 (3)**
FT8	609	686	713	38	184	**2230 (1677)**
SSB	359	461	255	0	0	**1075 (891)**
By continent and band						
AF	2 (2)	4 (2)	2 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	**8 (4)**
AS	326 (290)	481 (406)	483 (429)	8 (8)	182 (175)	**1480 (889)**
EU	427 (384)	548 (473)	169 (156)	4 (4)	0 (0)	**1148 (866)**
NA	172 (161)	74 (65)	268 (236)	24 (22)	0 (0)	**538 (425)**
OC	30 (28)	35 (34)	28 (28)	1 (1)	2 (2)	**96 (70)**
SA	11 (11)	8 (7)	18 (17)	1 (1)	0 (0)	**38 (30)**
Total (unique calls)	**968 (876=90.5%)**	**1150 (987=85.8%)**	**968 (868=89.7%)**	**38 (36=94.7)**	**184 (177=96.2%)**	**3308 (2284=69.0%)**

# of DXCC worked by 3D2JK (OC-095)						
By mode and band						
	20m	17m	15m	12m	6m	Total
CW	0	2	0	0	0	**2**
FT8	53	55	46	8	5	**79**
SSB	36	38	24	0	0	**54**
Total	**58**	**60**	**52**	**8**	**5**	**86**



3D2JK QSL card preview