

# Iony island expedition RIØC - Short story

Author: Vasily, RA1ZZ Translation: Vasily, R7AL and Andy, EU7A



It was a very difficult expedition. Check for endurance, strength of mind and patience.

We were very fortunate that a year and a half ago we met a brave guy - Andrey, the captain and owner of a sailing yacht "Esperance" in Kamchatka, since before that we spent more than a year searching for a suitable vessel for an expedition to Iony – most wanted Russian island under the IOTA ("Islands On The Air") award program. Not only the characteristics of the ship were important, as only to sail to the island is a big problem due to bad weather conditions, sea conditions and a lot of sticking stones around the island. It was important to find a member of the team who would also be obsessed with the idea and did everything possible to successfully complete the trip. Last year, we made a successful expedition to the island of Kambalnyy (AS-142) in Kamchatka, and immediately began to prepare for a more serious trip to the center of the Sea of Okhotsk.

Communication with scientists, travelers and participants of the first amateur radio expedition EK0AC to Iona island, which took place 27 years ago, helped us in the preparation, and we roughly imagined what awaits us there. We were also alarming by the fact that many travelers tried to land on the island earlier, but were unsuccessful.

In case of successful activation of AS-069, the part of our team was planned to visit two more IOTAs of the Sea of Okhotsk – Baidukova island, AS-114 and B. Shantar island, AS-044, which are also of great interest for island hunters worldwide. But we did not made an advance announcement about our further plans. Just

wanted to make another surprise for IOTA community, but only if everything went well with our main goal - Iony.

**RIØC**  
Iony isl.  
AS-069



The team is in a good mood, and a 7-hour flight over the whole country to the east does not seem tedious. In Khabarovsk, our friend Igor (RN0CT) meets us in airport and takes to his villa where we have a good dinner, and after a few hours of rest we are loading all the gear into a minibus that takes us to the southern coast of the Sea of Okhotsk - Nikolaevsk-on-Amur town. 18 hours of driving, most of which are on unpaved roads, seems to be a really difficult challenge.

In Nikolaevsk-on-Amur we are met by a local ham Valery, UA0CDH and driving to the hotel.

We get information that our yacht, which goes from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, was delayed because of the storm, and we will have to spend at least three days waiting for it in this small town in the lower reaches of the Amur River. But we decided that it's enough time to activate Baidukova Island, AS-114, which is only 60 km. far from our present location.



Valery, UA0CDH, negotiates with the transport, and early in the next morning we make our way through a narrow mountain road on two 4WD vehicles to a fishing village Ozerpah in Amur Delta. Another two hours on a fast fishing boats and we reached the Baidukova Island. Although the island has not been inhabited for several years, there are lots of fishermen here during the summer season. In addition, there is a weather station with the staff of two people. We quickly manage to agree with them to stay in one of the abandoned and semi-collapsed brick buildings.

The weather is perfect and we were able to quickly set up the station and putting up the first antenna – trapped vertical. The first “CQ R24RRC” was started at 07-20 UTC on 18 MHz. There was a pile-up of JA and UA0 stations immediately. A bit later, 3 element wired trib-ander was installed and ready to go. We were trying two high power stations running in the same time, but the generator does not stand the load (we were not using a spare generator on AS-114), and we were able to reduce the second station to 100 watts only. Later Slava (UA3LMR) were installed the 3-rd station for digital modes. He was also playing with VHF radio via a satellite. Sometimes it ended with success, and it’s about 20 QSO via SAT in our log.

The condition wasn’t bad, and the pile-ups on 20-40 meters does not stop almost all the night.

A day later, when our yacht was already few miles from the island, a storm began. The terrible wind and waves hit the island. The yacht crew was tried to approach the island, but it was not safe because of the shallows that surrounded the island. They decided to sail to the other end of the island to the bay to avoid possible damages of the vessel.

The storm lasts for another three days with wind gusts exceeding 30 m/s, and we had no chance to leave the island. On the fourth day the wind dropped and the yacht finally arrived to pick us up. We have returned to Nikolaevsk - on - Amur to collect the remaining equipment, as well as fuel, food e.t.c.

Few hours later we had received a new weather forecast - another cyclone is coming from the south, so we had to hurry. All the needed preparations took less than a four hours, and in the evening 21-th of July we have started the journey to our main goal – Iony island.

The path to the island took exactly two days. When only few miles left to the island the weather changed dramatically. We entered to a thick fog, the sun disappeared,

the air temperature dropped down to 5-6 degrees. The visibility was less than 20 meters and the speed had to be reduced to 1 knot per hour. It was really dangerous and scary, but we slowly continued to move closer and closer to the island’s shore. A huge number of birds around us made it clear that the target is somewhere in front of us.



At first we heard the sound of waves crashing against the rocks. Then a bird’s din, mixed with the roar of sea lions, which became stronger and stronger. Suddenly a huge black contours grew out of the mist and we saw his majesty - the mystery and legendary Iony island. Feeling of rapture and fear simultaneously embraced us...

According to the information received from the scientists, the only more or less suitable spot was the narrow beach in the southern part of the island...

Earlier we have prepared a rubber boat and a captain Andrey with the sailor goes to explore the island.

The boat returned with nothing- it’s impossible to go to the southern part of the island due to the rough sea, another landing sites could not be found for now due to a very heavy fog. Then we decided to wait till the next morning.



Slava (UA3LMR) was in deepest shock and told us that he refuses to further participation in the expedition because of the excessive risks to life.

We have lost one member, but all OK, it’s his decision. Four other continued...

Next day we made 4 or 5 trips to the island on a rubber boat under the difficult sea conditions.

After collecting all the information about the island’s shores, we come to the conclusion that there are only three possible landing places:

- a small bay in the North-East side of the Rock;

- a narrow beach filled with sea lions on the Northern side (but without the possibility of climbing up with the equipment);

- a small bay in the Southern side

Vladimir (RK8A) and Vasily (RA1ZZ) were landed on a first specified location in NE side. They were explored the north-east slope of the island for more than a 3 hours and came back to a shore with the bad news: it's absolutely impossible to get to the top of the island with the equipment and no any place to stay on the slopes... Nothing...

Later, Vasily (R7AL) and yacht's captain Andrey made an attempt to land on the beach with sea lions. Although from that place it was impossible to rise to the top, it would be possible to erect simple antenna and work Europe and USA, since these directions are just open from the beach. But sea lions took a strong defense. This place was a "reproductive rookery" with many small lions and their big mamas. We tried to move them away from the shore, but they absolutely did not want to leave... Two or three dozen of animals were floated around and fought on our rubber boat. They could turn over or damage it, so we were forced to go away.

So there was the last option - to catch the moment when the waves subsides, and try to land to one of the big stones on the southern side of the island, from where you can climbing up to the old building and possibly even to the very top of the island.

Catching a good moment, Vasily (R7AL), Vladimir (RK8A) and Sergey (RW5D) with a minimal set of equipment, food and water were finally landing on the island. This landing operation was an extremely dangerous and difficult.

Meanwhile, the guys dragged all the equipment upstairs, putting up the antenna and deployed the temporary shack in old building (which was build and used by ornithologists about 30 years ago), after removing a few kilograms of bird droppings from it.

The signals of the RI0C expedition flew on the air! Despite the fact that at the time of the first turn-on the 20m band was completely empty, our RX frequency was exploded with many signals just after the our first CQ. People waited for us and watched on frequency! Unfortunately, only Japan, the Far East and Oceania are calling. Europe and NA almost does not hear us - the north and west paths are completely closed and we are running barefoot only. There was a hope that in the next morning the wind would change the direction, and the second group from a yacht with a long coax, amplifiers, warm clothes, food, water and other necessary things would arrive. But the wind only intensified, and the waves became stronger and stronger, crashing against the shore of the island. Yacht threw from side to side and had to circle around the island to find a more or less suitable place to cover from a wind.

Sadly, in next morning the weather did not improve, and the terrible waves continued to crashing on the coastal rocks. Equipment and food were tightly packed and waiting for their hour on the yacht, along with a diving suit, which we wanted to use when landing.

The in-island team were not sleeping all the night long, but continuously QRV with two stations, a non-stop CQ

all that time on most common bands, as there was no place to sleep, and the air was the only opportunity to escape from the cold and the smell...

But the results were not impressive. 80% of all QSOs were with Asia and Oceania, about a hundred Europeans and only few NA stations. Of course, we were not satisfied at all.

During the day we have made several attempts to pass the equipment and food to the in-island team, but they are all were completely unsuccessful. The next morning pleased us with clear sunny weather. Saint Iona took pity on us and drove the fog from the island. It has become noticeably warmer and we were able to partially dry our wet clothes. But unfortunately the waves were as strong as yesterday and another attempt to pass something to the islanders failed.

Meanwhile the guys on the island, no longer hoping for the help from the yacht's team, spliced two pieces of coax and carried the main antenna thru the almost vertical cliffs to the western slope of the island. This gave a chance to hunters from North American continent. As the result we have logged another 100 NA stations in next few hours...

The situation became more dangerous for in-island team with each passing hour: absolutely no food, almost no water, the wind should change to the South in a next 24 hours. Team decided to immediately evacuate from the island. Guys hastily packed and lowered down all the equipment and antennas, and Andrey went on a boat to the shore. The wave did not stop for a minute, and after several unsuccessful attempts to approach to the shore, Vladimir (RK8A) jumps into the sea and overcomes several meters to the boat in icy water (5-6 C). Vasily managed to get to the big stone which was located few meters from the shore. Another few meters left for the boat, but he was knocked off by the big wave and dropped into the sea. Sergey came to a rescue and get him from the water. They were really tired and had to stay on the island until the morning.

Next morning the waves became slightly smaller, and it was possible to transfer the part of equipment from the island to the boat by throwing it off the cliff and pick up the remaining Robinsons - Sergey and Vasily. Unfortunately, most of the equipment and clothes had to be left on the island.



RW5D and R7AL with GDXF flag

Edited for GDXF by DJ9HX, Uwe