

VK5CE/P DXpedition to Red Island (OC-255)

By Craig Edwards

Thank you for the sponsorship provided for my two one-man-operation IOTA DXpeditions of 2013. In August there was the successful DXpedition to Flinders Island OC-261 with 4893 QSOs in 6 days. The second DXpedition was the much rarer Red Island OC-255 at the most northern part of Australia off the tip of Queensland. OC-255 has only been activated once back in 2002 when PA3EXX had 1745 QSOs in 4 days and so now OC-255 had become a fairly rare IOTA being only claimed by 15.4% of registered participants in the IOTA program.

For all of my previous IOTA DXpeditions there has been some inhabitants or facilities on the island. For instance Magnetic Island OC-171 (2010 and 2011) was a popular tourist island with a daily ferry service from Townsville, Fitzroy Island OC-172 (2010) had a resort on it with an almost daily fast catamaran service from Cairns and Horn Island OC-138 (2011) had a pub and motel with a daily flight there from Cairns. Then I started to get a little more adventurous, Bremer Island OC-185 (2012) had basic eco-tourism accommodation but it needed a charter boat from Gove for the visit and Flinders Island OC-261 (2013) this year also had accommodation but it needed a single engine charter plane from Port Lincoln to get there.

It was time to draw inspiration from my collection of DXpedition DVDs by K4UEE and 9V1YC, etc and go somewhere that was totally uninhabited, that was in a very remote part of Australia and was in high demand and hadn't been activated for a long time. OC-255 fitted these criteria as Red Island is totally uninhabited and is in one of the remotest parts of Australia off the far north tip of Queensland.

The journey to get to this island was a long one from my home in Middleton, South Australia that took two days with an overnight stay in Cairns. It required two flights totalling 4400 km or a bit over 7000 miles from Adelaide to Cairns and then Cairns to Bamaga. From Bamaga I was picked up by my support guy who lives in Seisia which is the remote town that's closest to Red Island.

When I saw the island from the mainland there was an air of excitement about being on my rarest IOTA yet especially as it is on a deserted island, while at the same time there was a feeling of nervousness as this is the first trip where I've really had to take safety and life support into consideration. The cost of this DXpedition was very high and so I appreciate the sponsorship contribution. I had to freight lots of life support and radio equipment prior to my flight including tent, fuel containers, generator, etc etc. The

cost of equipment freighting, boat hire and island support guy, flights, accommodation, fuel and QSL card printing costed over \$5700.



View on Red Island

Then there was the cost of the Honda EU10i generator which was \$1300 on top of the DXpedition costs. The good thing is that now I have a high quality lightweight generator for future IOTA DXpeditions. I first noticed this 900W generator on the VP8THU and VP8GEO DXpedition videos. It's quiet, lightweight, high quality and can be easily posted to a location for a DXpedition as it only weighs 13kg. This is also very manageable when you're carrying it on a beach from a tinny boat in the tropics.

On Wednesday morning we packed all of the 18 boxes I'd previously sent into the tinny boat that was on the trailer. On my flights I'd arranged and paid for extra luggage, so I brought with me things like the two 12m Spiderbeam poles, laptop computer, headphones, Icom IC7000, SWR/Power meter and one of the power supplies, etc. That morning I then bought 50L of fuel, food, ice and lots of water. The little tinny boat was very full but fortunately it is only a 20 minute boat ride to the island.



Camp on the island

Unloading the boat at 11:00am it was 31C and around 75% humidity and so it was really hard work carrying all of the equipment that is required to build an IOTA DXpedition station for 5 days of operation supplies. My support guy helped me unload all of the gear on a site around 20m off the high tide mark of the beach, he also helped me with the tent and build a large tarpaulin canopy to provide shade. Erecting the shade canopy was the first priority due to the stifling heat of the tropics and the risk of heat stroke and heat exhaustion was very high. My support guy then left and I was now alone on the island. I was already really tired and the sight of so many boxes to unpack and organise was a little overwhelming. It was now 12:00 noon and I had about 6 hours before sunset – I had to get the station operational which included building the 15m and 20m vertical dipoles before sunset at 0830 UTC.



The vertical dipoles

Over the ensuing next 6 hours the camp came together and by 6pm the station was operational but I really wasn't feeling well. I'd been drinking lots of water but was still dehydrated and feeling the signs of heat exhaustion. After putting up the first vertical dipole I actually became dizzy and really disorientated. So I had a 30 minute rest and eventually pushed on to get the second vertical dipole up.

On Wednesday October 16 at 0900 UTC I began operating and after an hour of mainly JA and UA0/9 the band opened to Europe at 1000 UTC and in the 1100-1400 UTC I'd ask everyone to stand by to allow a small number of weaker North Americans to break through. The pile-up lasted for 9 hours and I collapsed onto the air mattress at 1800 UTC/4:00am with a thousand QSO's in the log – wow what a long long day!

The routine consisted of the following over the next four days. I'd wake up after 3 hours sleep at 2100 UTC/7:00am and try to regain some form consciousness and have some breakfast and experience the unpleasantness of no running water or toilet facilities. I'd then refuel the generator and prepare/tidy the tent ready for another day. By 2200UTC/8:00am I'd go to 15m and call CQ where I'd tend to work mainly JA and a small number of

North American stations until 12:00 noon (0200 UTC). During this time there was never a pile-up, just really a very slow trickle of QSO's but it was still worth it.



Closer look on the camp

I'd then have lunch, and fortunately I was able to receive a bare threshold mobile phone signal from Horn Island which meant I could do the Club Log upload, check emails and update the blog site – this reduced the number of dupe QSO's to <1% and meant a lot more people could get that new one. During this time my support guy would visit me and bring a few bags of ice from the mainland. This was of vital importance as the heat and humidity in the tropics is so oppressive. This simple pleasure of having cold water and soft drinks for each day made this harsh existence bearable. The temperatures on the island never got below 25C overnight.

At 0500 UTC I would then go back to 15m and again there would be a slow trickle of JA stations with the occasional South American station and by 0600 UTC the first European signal would appear. Each night as regular as clockwork 15m would magically open up to Europe at 0930 UTC will a very big pile-up, I'd then QSY around 1100 UTC to 20m. I did this to ensure that North America, Europe and Asia all had the chance to work me as this is when the monster pile-ups would occur.



Beach and antennas

From 1100-1700 UTC is when the majority of the QSO's would occur at 120+ per hour. Things would then slow down in the 1700-1800 UTC period (3:00-4:00am) and then I'd collapse onto the air mattress with a massive head ache, and feeling sweaty, dirty, smelly and with a sore body from sitting in the same spot for so long.....but my face on the pillow would have a big smile on my face knowing that the 1000+ QSO's per day average was happening. Although I was a little disappointed with the 1100-1400 UTC 20m propagation to North America – I'd ask for "North America only" many many times each night and there just weren't many W/VE's making it into the log. On the last two days I woke up a little earlier and was on 20m in the 2100-2200 UTC period before going to 15m. I would only work about 30 stations per hour on both of these mornings, but the QSO's were from really excited people from some difficult propagation long-paths such as HK, PY, YV, LU, 9Y4 and VP8.



Warning for crocodiles

There was the ever present threat of crocodiles and this would cross my mind as I went to bed. I was on the north side of the island and there was a large crocodile on the south side of the island. I would hope that he would stay in his territory. Mind you the mangrove on the north side of the island was a constant reminder that maybe there was one there too. I would inspect the beach each day for crocodile slide marks in the sand. This is the problem with a tent and generator style DXpedition in the tropical north of Australia!

Results:

Total
5271 QSO's in 5 days and all SSB

Band

2865 QSO's 54% 20m
2406 QSO's 46% 15m

Continent

3280 QSO's 62% Europe
1384 QSO's 26% Asia
338 QSO's 6% North America
224 QSO's 4% Oceania
30 QSO's <1% South America
15 QSO's <1% Africa



Craig with antenna

Now to start planning for the 2014 IOTA DXpedition(s).....and figuring out how to explain it to my wife. So I look forward to working you again next year as VK5CE/? from OC-???

73s de Craig VK5CE

vk5ce@yahoo.com.au

and

<http://oc255.blogspot.com.au/>

Edited for GDXF by Uwe, DJ9HX