

Azores 2015 – HQ Doods DXpedition

W3IZ – N3ZXF – K0BJ – IV3VSC – K11U – N5ZGT – KA5TLN

By Bruce Frahm, K0BJ

The Second Dood's Expedition

ARRL's Emergency Preparedness manager Mike Corey K11U was part of the 20 or so hams that activated all nine islands of the Azores in September 2012. (QST Feb. 2013, pgs 72-5) Mike is a key member of HQ Doods, an informal group of ARRL staff, officials and friends that occasionally perform DXpeditions on their own time and expense. I joined Mike and Mike N1TA in December 2013 as 8P8T from Barbados for the ARRL 10 Meter contest, another HQ Doods operation.



Sete Cidades (N5ZGT Photo)

Lagoa do Fogo on east Sao Miguel (K0BJ Photo)

Mike had so much fun in the Azores, he organized a return which would activate three of the group's nine islands. The Worked All Europe SSB contest was chosen. ARRL affiliated club and LoTW specialist Norm Fusaro W3IZ and his XYL Debbie N3ZXF, Rocky Mountain Director Brian Mileschosky N5ZGT and his XYL Katelyn KA5TLN -- and I -- soon joined the group. We had an open seat and my friend Claudio Vascotto IV3VSC ex-ET3VSC from Trieste Italy decided to join us.

Travel to the Azores

Claudio arrived in the Azorean capital Ponta Delgada late September 8, and we Yanks flew in from Boston, arriving early the next morning. Francisco, CU2DX and our host Jose, CU2CE met us. We rented cars and drove to our apartments at Jose's, meeting his XYL Paula CU2YL. After a couple hours' snooze (CU-land is 5 hours ahead of CDT.... same as GMT) we explored the calderas and other volcanic features and plant life of western Sao Miguel, the largest of the Azores. An evening of wonderful fresh fish and DXing at Jose's, signing CT8/home calls brought an end to our full first day.



Claudio in the caldeira on west side of Sao Miguel (K0BJ Photo)



Site seeing on Sao Miguel (K0BJ Photo)

Thursday we visited the rugged eastern part of the island, seeing lake-filled calderas and magnificent ocean vistas. We enjoyed a tasty stew cooked in the ground at a geothermal geyser area near aptly-named Furnas.

On Friday we divided into our three contest groups. Norm and Debbie stayed to operate at Jose's – with Norm and Jose using Norm's special contest call CR1IZ. Mike returned to his "9 Islands" QTH on Faial at the CU7CRA club station. Brian and Katelyn accompanied him. Claudio and I went to CU4DX on the small island of Graciosa.

Graciosa

This is a contest station occupying an old telecom site on a hill above and dramatically near the coast. Francisco and Jose own the station, and Francisco accompanied us on our flight to set things up for us. CU4DX uses fixed yagis on the high bands. The Europe yagi needed to have two crossed directors separated, and the Asia yagi required repointing. Luckily Claudio is an enthusiastic alpinist and he eagerly climbed the towers. We got a few needed odd parts at the local Chinese general store. My XYL and I were familiar with the entrepreneurial Chinese from our 1979 circumnavigation.... their "little bit of everything" businesses were present on every island in the Pacific. It was interesting to find they are in the eastern Atlantic as well.



NA yagi element; photo looking to north Africa (IV3VSC Photo)



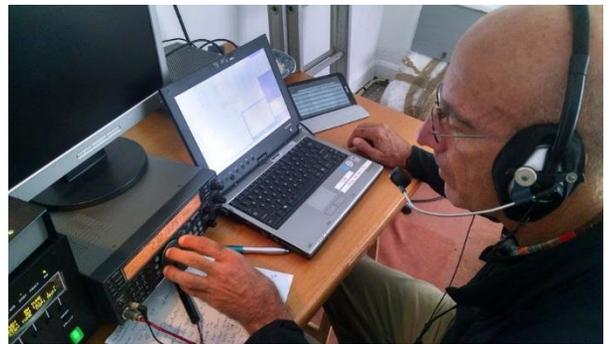
CU4DX station. Looking to SA (K0BJ Photo)

The contest started at local midnight, running for 48 hours. It's Europe working the rest of world in WAE. Along with the usual country multipliers Worked All Europe features "QTCs". A non-Europe station can send a list of up to ten QTC from his contest log to any given Europe station; the QTC includes GMT time of the QSO, call sign, and the European's serial QSO number. Each correctly received QTC counts a point for both sender and receiver, just the same as the original QSO. We are near the bottom of the sunspot cycle, and the weekend had much worse than average low cycle conditions. However being in the westernmost part of Europe was often advantageous in scaring up contacts, and we had lots of fun despite the poor conditions. More on the contest later.

Claudio and I had our meals at the Club Sport Maritimo.... home of the local pro soccer team. Usually 4-12 team members were at the front table eating, visiting and watching soccer games on tv, while 2-30 'civilians' had their meal to the back of the large dining hall/bar. A typical mealtime crowd was about 8 outsiders but the place was packed Saturday night. We had hearty fixed-menu meals prepared by the XYL of Guillerme CU4AB, accompanied by our choice of Sagres beer or wine. During the contest Claudio and I ate in shifts to keep the radio attended fulltime. We sure enjoyed eating together at non-contest times. The drive to Club Sport was about 2km and involved negotiating the steep, narrow road to the telecom site now used as CU4DX. On Sunday we took turns driving around and exploring Graciosa. There is a spectacular road around the main caldera, and a dramatic rocky beach on the south side of the island. Our town had maybe 3000 residents, with about 6K total on Graciosa. Weather, by the way, was very nice during our stay. Temperatures were in the mid-70s daytime with beautiful skies most days. Saturday PM and Sunday AM were windy, cool and moody.



Claudio, IV3VSC and Bruce, K0BJ



Claudio, IV3VSC running (K0BJ Photo)



The coast of Graciosa from the caldera. CU7CRA located on Faial is beyond Sao Jorge in the distance (K0BJ Photo)

Faial

Upon arrival on Faial Mike, Brian and Kaitlyn were met by Manuel, CU7CA. Manuel and his daughter Vanessa, CU7CE, hosted one of the teams during the 9 Island Hunt. The four of made their way to the station. They quickly found that they would have quite a challenge ahead of them for the contest with a non-functioning rotator and no tubes for the amp. The guys rose to the challenge and made the most of things by improvising with a wire antenna and making use of the bonus QTC, but didn't have competitive QSO totals.

Outside the contest the group took time to visit sites on the island with more than a meal or two coming from Peter's Café Sport. The group also visited the caldera with its spectacular views.

Before heading back to Sao Miguel they also took a day trip to the island of Pico.

Sao Miguel

Meanwhile Norm loved CQing and running at CR1IZ and logged an impressive ~1000 contest Qs on 20 Meters. He and Jose had a total of 1350 QSOs.

While Norm and Jose ran the contest, Debbie and Paula set out to visit some of the area beaches.



Brian, N5ZGT and Manuel, CU7CA (KI1U Photo)

Band / item	CR1IZ	CU4DX	CU7CRA
3.5 QSO	37	50	
3.5 QTC	0	32	
Multx4	72	100	
7 QSO	179	118	46
7 QTC	26	183	43
Multx3	93	120	72
14 QSO	971	455	57
14 QTC	177	186	6
Multx2	112	116	56
21 QSO	161	267	55
21 QTC	88	421	10
Multx2	82	122	56
28 QSO	14	18	5
28 QTC	20	24	10
Multx2	8	14	6
Score	613991	827888	43890
Station	CR1IZ	CU4DX	CU7CRA
Total QSO	1362	908	163
Total QTC	311	846	69
Tot Mult pts	367	472	190

Contest Assessment

Claudio has run pileups from Ethiopia, and has done VHF contesting. But CU4DX was his first HF DX contest. He did FB, although he didn't get used to receiving QTCs. He and I both love tuning for QSOs (S&Ping... Search and Pounce) but did some running as well, especially when the bands opened to the USA and we logged a lot of low serial numbers.....guys out for a new country contact, or just to have some fun. In the end we made only 950 QSOs total... less than CR1IZ's on 20M alone!

Well, by S&Ping we dug up a lot of multiplier countries and outdid CR1IZ on mults, even single-band on IZ's bread 'n butter 20M. They also logged more Qs than us on 40 but again we topped their mults there, and on the other three bands we scored both more QSOs and mults. By the way 40M multipliers are weighted 150%, and 80M at 200%. Being an old traffic guy I really enjoy QTCs, particularly as they are the unique 'twist' in the WAE contest. There's another thing about the QTCs..... when we received a QTC listing a time and # for CR1IZ or CU7CRA, we had a window into how our contact totals compared to theirs. Hours into the contest we could tell CRA was having problems, and that IZ was rockin' and rollin'.

In the end the strength of our QTC points and multipliers outdid CR1IZ's 1.5 : 1 QSO ratio against us and Claudio and I beat out Norm and Jose for high score amongst the HQ Doods. But much more than final score, the experience of operating the contest from our unique locations, and meeting and working with local hams was what made this trip rewarding.

I usually called CQers with "Charlie United Four Delta X-ray" I like the flow of United as compared to Uniform. I bet half our comebacks said "GU4DX, you're 59 #", thinking we were in Guernsey. I don't know if most doubted CU was considered Europe, or if CU4's rarity compared to GU4 did it, or...? I wanted to say "Wine, not milk" but thought better of it and simply corrected our prefix. We were called by lots of Europeans. A few wanted a contact with Azores for DXCC or Graciosa's EU-175 Islands On The Air number, but most were WAE contestants mistakenly thinking Azores was in Africa, like the Portuguese-owned sister islands of Madeira to our south. I might have laughed at their ignorance but..... ummmm.....as we planned this contest expedition I was thinking we'd be spending the weekend working Europe – I was thinking Azores was considered Africa just like Madeira! I only discovered my error the weekend earlier when I worked a CU station that was in Zone 14 – Western Europe. Live and learn.



Claudio, IV3VSC; Bruce, K0BJ; Brian, N5ZGT; Kaitlyn, KA5TLN
at Furnas (K11U Photo)

Return to Sao Miguel

Monday we reconvened at Jose's on Sao Miguel to swap stories. We paid a visit to OH2BH et al's CR2X superstation, only 2 miles from Jose's. What an impressive location and antenna farm! We met more local hams.....another Jose CU2AP and Duarte KA1HFL/CU2JR, and had a celebration dinner with Jose, Paula and Francisco.



Brian, N5ZGT (KI1U Photo)

Before departing the Azores we took an escorted walking tour around Ponta Delgada led by local guide Rui Amen. Rui led a similar tour for those on the 9 Islands Hunt. The tour lasted a couple hours and took in the Convent of Our Lady of Hope, the marina area, the city gates, the fort, and allowed for some final souvenir shopping.

Following the tour we made our way to the airport for our flights home.



The HQ Doods WAE SSB operators in Ponta Delgada (Rui Amen Photo)



The view of Pico from Faial (KI1U Photo)