



The WACOM HAM



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Editor: Kevin Smith

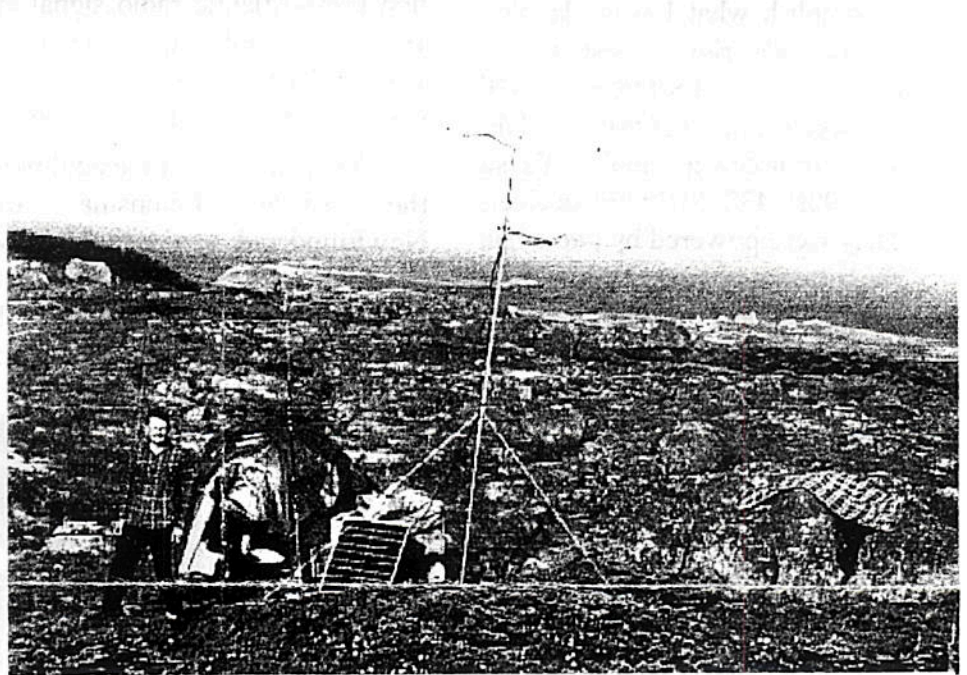
Washington, PA

Solo DXpedition to St. Pierre

by Ken Frankenberg AA3GM

"Now let me get this straight, your going to spend part of your vacation camping alone on top of a barren French island off Newfoundliand for five days and operate your Ham radio"..... "Uhh.. Why?" "Your crazy!" So said one of my colleagues at the US Forest Service as she heard me describe what I planned to do on my three week vacation. As for the label of crazy, I suggest the reader refer to my earlier club newsletter article of *A Terminal Case of HAM*. Yes, I have done a number of things during my four and a half years as an amateur operator, but one which has eluded me thus far has been the DXpedition.

I have been wanting to go to the Canadian province of Newfoundland for several years now and decided to make the trip during the 500th anniversary celebrations of its discovery by John Cabot in 1497. During my time there, I planned a short day trip to the French owned islands



Ken Frankenberg FP/AA3GM on St. Pierre; 15 July 1997.

of St. Pierre & Miquelon just to say that I've been there. Then a thought just struck me - how about operating Ham radio during the IARU Contest and maybe even the CQ VHF Contest? Wow!! What an idea! I can just take a ferry and drive my truck and operate there - it will be easy and I'll have a blast! Well, as I looked further into it I found out that my trusty 1989 Ford Ranger (with 140,000 miles on it) would have to stay on Newfoundland due to the ferry to St. Pierre et Miquelon only takes people. So, I would have to *carry* all of my gear with me! I also needed to apply for a operating permit from

France. At first I thought it was hopeless but as the gears turned, I figured out a plan of action.

I first E-mailed the ARRL and they sent me a French license application where upon I filled it out and sent it registered with a crisp 100 Franc note inside. I expected a nightmare in dealing with the French bureaucracy, but I surprisingly had my permit in hand two weeks later with the call of FP/AA3GM. I then told my dad, Lowell Frankenberg, what I was planning, and he graciously made a wooden cart from the steel frame of a dolly so I could transport the equipment. During Field Day, I set up just as

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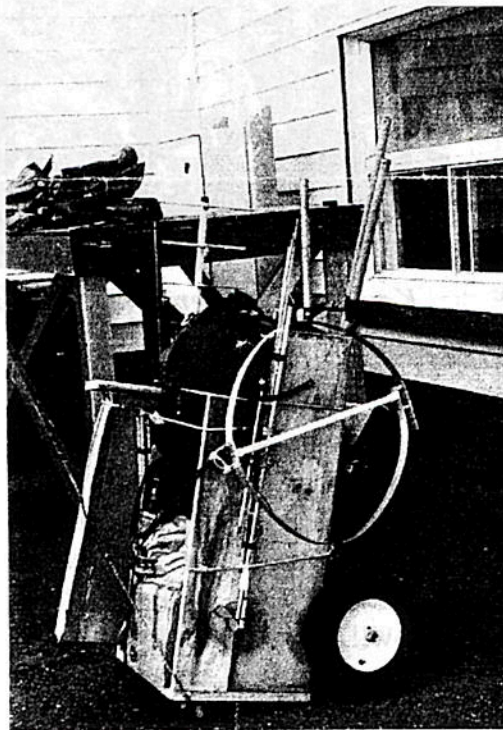
I planned to do up there and made a dry run. The result was... GO FOR IT!

I spent a great deal of time preparing (and of course buying) the equipment I needed to accomplish what I was planning to do. My rigs consisted of a Kenwood TS-690S HF transceiver, an ICOM-706 HF/VHF transceiver, and a Yaesu FT-790II 432 MHz transceiver. They were powered by two small car batteries charged up by a 3.55 amp solar panel. I also brought with me a small assortment of antennas: an Alpha Delta Perth Outbacker multi-band mobile antenna; 20m, 40m, and 15m Lakeview HAMsticks; a vertical antenna and an AEA Halo-6 loop for 6-meters; a Cushcraft 124 WB 2-meter beam; and a Cushcraft 11-element 432 MHz beam antenna. All of this (including coax, tools, and some spare parts) fit into the modified dolly mentioned earlier.

On the 4th of July, I left my home in Kane, Pennsylvania and headed northeast for the three week journey. I drove to Portland, Maine in two days, took a ferry from there to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia over night, and then proceeded northeast up the peninsula arriving in North Sydney in the evening of July 6th. The next day, I set sail for a 14 hour ferry ride to the eastern Newfoundland port of Argentia. We passed nearby the island of St. Pierre on a clear, blue day, giving me a preview of what I was up against - a steep, rocky and barren

granite island in the cold North Atlantic. The next day, I arrived in Newfoundland's capital city of St. Johns and spent some time making a few contacts from Signal Hill - the site where Gaglielmo Marconi received the first trans-Atlantic radio signal in 1901. The hill had a beautiful view of the Atlantic with an iceberg and later, whales to see.

The next day, I traveled down the Burin Peninsula of Newfoundland eventually reaching the fishing port of Fortune. The beautiful weather I had for the past week ended on



Cart for the DXpedition to St. Pierre.

July 10th with rain and wind as I was ready to go to St. Pierre & Miquelon. In Fortune, I loaded up all of my HAM gear onto the cart and pushed it while carrying a 30 pound backpack (with my tent, food, sleeping bag, and other

supplies) on my shoulders. The crew of the ferry had to literally manhandle the heavy cart to get it on the boat. With me and my gear safely aboard, I was taken with a number of other tourists to the stark land of FP. To say I stuck out a little bit in the crowd was an understatement. Many people asked me "What are you doing with all of that...that...stuff." Fortunately, the fellow at French customs was easy going (I think he just wanted to go home!), and upon seeing my license, waved me along. Whew! Going through customs was my greatest concern (or so I thought). I then pushed the cart up a low grade hill to a bed & breakfast that I had reserved for the night. Upon arriving, it began to rain. I left the cart out in the back yard of the B&B home and covered it with two layers of plastic sheeting. With the elements cold and miserable, I relaxed, planned, and prayed for better weather.

The next morning showed the slightest indication that it was going to clear up. The rain had stopped and it was a typical cool, damp and foggy day. I went to town to get some French pastries (delicious!!) and a few other things. Then I called a station wagon taxi at 10:00 AM and the driver loaded up all of my stuff and took me to the top (or so I thought) of the island. It was so foggy that I could hardly see anything. I told the driver to let me off (and pick me up the morning of the 15th) and I hiked a short distance and set up camp next to a small pond on the hill

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overlooking the town.

I got the tent set up and went to work with the antennas. I staked in a piece of sheet metal to the ground and set a three-prong mag-mount on it. I then mounted the Perth Outbacker on the mount and connected it to the radios. Getting good ground was a problem. St. Pierre was one of two things: solid granite or mushy bog. There was very little real soil to speak of. I made the best of a bad situation and got it all set up by 1430 local - I was ready to operate. The skies then cleared up with the sun shining brilliantly! My solar panel now had direct light to work with in charging my batteries! Visions of pile-ups were dancing in my head as I was ready to call CQ. However, I was to be greatly disappointed. Just before going QRV, I listened to WWV which announced that the solar flux had dipped to an incredibly low 67! It doesn't get much lower

than that folks! Over a year into the next cycle - where are the sunspots? Among crystal clear weather and flawlessly working equipment, Mr. Murphy finally came to pay a visit with paltry band conditions. I began to call CQ (on both SSB and CW) at 1630Z on July 11th and the results were just as I had feared...hardly anyone heard me. I did manage about 24 contacts to the states and to Europe before the IARU Contest. However, I believed that I was going to be sunk.

I did have a bit of luck the next day with a small 10-meter and real nice 15-meter opening to the eastern US and Europe just as the IARU contest started. There was a lot of activity and I managed to get through the QRM on the strong stations to make contacts. I made QSOs with a number of Zone 8 (eastern US) stations which were worth three points a piece for contest purposes. Activity on my zone

(number 9) was very scarce and I contacted only one Canadian Maritime station from there. As the contest went on, there were a few small openings to Europe on 20-meters where I was able to get through. However, overall it was like pulling teeth for a QSO. Even with full sunlight, I was forced to run about 80 watts just to be heard, slowly draining my batteries in the process. By evening, I was on 40-meters and tried to conserve as much power as I could by running the minimum and yet still be heard on CW. The next morning I made only 10 more contacts and the contest was over. I logged 180 contacts (570 QSO points) with 60 multipliers for a total score of 34,200 points. That wasn't too bad considering the wretched conditions. I then let the batteries charge up while I got some rest. Later that afternoon, I made seven RS-12 satellite contacts by transmitting on 15-meters and receiving on 10-

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WACOM members assisting the Labor Day Classic 5K Run Walk from left to right: Jim McNutt - net control station, Ted Lockman, Walt Piroth, Russ Berhenn, Bill Hill, and Kevin Smith. Photo by Matt Piroth

November Western Pennsylvania VE Test Opportunities

(A) = ARRL/VEC, (L) = LAUREL/VEC, (M) = MOUNTAIN/VEC,

(5) = W5YI/VEC, *P* = Pre-registration requested, *N* = No walk-ins, WI = walk-ins

Date	Location	Time	Club	Contact	Telephone
1	Erie.		RA of Erie	Norma Vanderhoff	814-665-9124 (A)
8	Butler,	9 AM.	Butler Co ARA.	Gerald Wetzel,	412-282-6777 *N* (A)
8	North Huntingdon			Ricardo Morales,	412-384-6311 (5)
15	Erie	12:30 PM	Gannon Wireless	John Duda	814-734-4260 (A)
16	Ellwood City				412-752-1064 (5)
20	New Castle	6:15 PM	Lawrence Co ARA	Fred Van Natten	412-667-9451 (5)
22	Beaver Falls	8:30 AM		Thomas Peluso	412-843-6560 *P* (A)
22	Pittsburgh	10 AM	WPA Hilltoppers	Dennis Tanner	412-885-8073 (A)
22	Pittsburgh	noon	North Hills ARC	Bud Faulhaber	412-366-5097 (A)
22	Reno	7 PM	Ft Venango Mike/Key.	Mary Housholder	814-437-2036 (A)
29	Greensburg	9 AM	Foothills ARC	Al Compton	412-523-3727 (A)

Top signs that you may need an elmer..

By Jeffrey S. King, N1DJS, jeff.king@cbis.com

An elmer is the guy you go to, to ask questions about topics in Ham Radio that you don't understand. In that vein, you know it's time for you to find an Elmer if...

- Your friend tells you he has a new two meter radio and you figure one of the meters must be for swr and the other for power out.
- You hear a conversation on the low bands about CW and you think they're referring to the cold war.
- You hear someone sign this is N8XXX mobile 4 and you think it's because he has three other radios
- You hear that someone won a 40 meter radio at a hamfest and you wonder how they're going to get something that large in their house.
- You build a morse code key out of plexiglass and can't figure out why it won't key your radio.
- You think the difference between short wave and long wave is the speed at which you move your wrist back and forth.
- You're thinking about joining your other ham friends in the local ATV group because you own a four wheel drive vehicle that will go just about anywhere.
- You won't use a repeater because you've heard that using a repeater could be dangerous. You've heard an alligator could get you.
- You think a colinear antenna can only be used with two amplifiers.
- You think fm is the modulation type that came after em, dm, cm, bm and am.
- You wouldn't mind getting into packet radio but no matter how much you practice you can't get the hang of sending those beeps and braps with your keyer.
- You wonder what sound a short wave makes and why anyone would want to listen to one.
- You think the repeater owner would be a lot happier if instead of talking about his cavities he just went to the dentist and got them filled.
- You think a CW ID is the number the army gave you on your dog tags during the cold war.

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meters. FP is a very rare DX country and grid (GN-16) for satellite.

I then took some time off on Sunday afternoon (July 13th) to play tourist and go hiking on the surrounding barren hills during the nice clear weather. I got some great pictures of the island, town, and North Atlantic. It was great just to get out of that tent after being cooped up and stiff from sitting in there the past couple of days. That evening, just as I prepared to lay down for the night, a huge red flash and boom illuminated and sounded over my tent. I quickly jumped out into the cold and realized that St. Pierre was lobbing fireworks from the town to above the hill where I was camped in the French

celebration of Bastille Day! I had a front row seat in which to oooh and ahhh from!

On the 14th of July, the weather began to slowly worsen. I was calling CQ on 30-meters when I heard the crash of thunder. I could hear the buzz of static emanating from my antenna and quickly took them down. This was my worse nightmare - a thunderstorm. I was out in the absolute open in a flimsy dome tent with lightning flashing all about me. My tent also leaked water at the lower seams and I was literally bailing out the wet stuff to keep it from flooding my station. Thankfully, the series of storms eventually left and I was back on the air. I soon discovered a nice 40-meter opening to central Europe. I

called CQ on CW and all of a sudden I had the pile-up I had been dreaming of! I had never heard a CW pile-up directed at me before! What chaos!! I fired back and made about 30 easy contacts when the batteries gave out due to the cloudy skies during the day. My DXpedition was over. In all, I made nearly 300 QSOs and contacted 34 countries. There were no VHF openings which the exception of one 6-meter contact.

Would I go back and do it again? You bet! However, I think I will wait until the sunspots safely return before my next attempt. Just before I left the island, I met Jean Christophe, FP5AC. He told me that there are only four active radio amateurs on St. Pierre & Miquelon. He invited me to come back and offered any assistance he could provide. I might take him up on it. Maybe I can use his station during the ARRL DX Contest in February 1999. I'll have to see what happens. Getting bit by the HAM bug is bad enough, but after you have sunk your teeth into a DXpedition (no matter how it turns out), you want to do it again even more! Lets see now... where did I put that tour package information?

WACOM Committee Phone Directory

A.R.E.S.	Dave DeMotte, N3IDH	228-8178
RACES	Bob Ketzell, KB3IN	228-0425
EMA	Dave Smith, N3LIK	225-0346
President	Paul Plants, N3WMV	225-8637
Vice President	Joe Musante, WB3GTE	223-0897
Secretary	Patty Marshall, N3XAR	225-8637
Treasurer	Kevin Smith, N3HKQ	258-4153
Education	Jim Burtoft, KC3HW	228-0546
2mtr Net Mgr.	Jim Grazulis, KA3KSP	228-7583
10mtr Net Mgr.	Joe Musante, WB3GTE	223-0897
Newsletter	Kevin Smith, N3HKQ	258-4153
Repeater	Sam Mayberry, W3CYO	222-0367
VE Testing	Open	

**SKYWARN Training
Given Locally**

ARES Coordinator Dave DeMotte, N3IDH announces that a SKYWARN Weather Spotting class will be given by a meteorologist of the National Weather Service. The three hour class will begin at 6:30 PM on Wednesday, December 10, 1997 at the South Strabane Volunteer Fire Department, 1696 East Maiden Street, Washington, PA. Call Dave DeMotte at 228-8178 for more information.

