



# Northern California DX Foundation

www.ncdxf.org

Spring 2012

## HKØNA DXpedition 2012

Bob Allphin, K4UEE

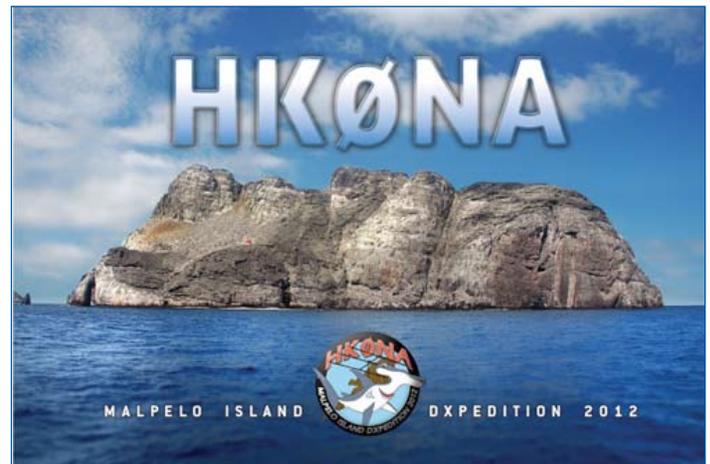
195,000 QSOs. Wow! How DOES a DXpedition make that many contacts? Well, it's just simple math: have a lot of radios and antennas, a lot of days on the air and enough operators to keep making QSOs day after day. And that is exactly what we did, piling up about 10,000-15,000 contacts each day.

That wasn't always the plan. Originally when the DXpedition to Malpelo Island was first announced, there were to be six Colombian (HK) operators and four foreign operators. When Gregg Marco, W6IZT, and I were invited to join the team, we recommended expanding to 14 total by adding more foreign operators. Then one day, we saw on the DXpedition website that we were now co-leaders. It was news to us, but in the end we played important roles in the operation. Gregg was asked to handle equipment procurement, antennas and the IT requirements; I was to handle

fund-raising, public relations, and help build and manage the operator team.

### Change in plans

In October 2011, three team members conducted a recon trip to the island. While on Malpelo, the Colombian Marine contingent stationed there had shown Jorge Prieto, HK1R (the DXpedition organizer), Faber Mosquera, HK6F, and Sal Gechem, HK1T, the way to the top of the highest peak on island. This literally opened up a whole new world to them; they had a 360° view of the entire radio world. All the previous DXpeditions to Malpelo had been conducted from



the only flat spot on the island on the eastern side, about a third of the way up. This location was blocked, radio-wise, from about north through west, and all the way to south as the steep mountain walls rose sharply another 600 feet from this normal QTH. As a result, contacts in the past with the West coast of the U.S., Japan, Asia, the Pacific, Southeast Asia and VK/ZL were hard to come by. They now saw a way to change

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The HKØNA team.

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## From the President's desk

THE YEAR 2012 STARTED WONDERFULLY FOR NCDXF when, in January, Don Greenbaum, N1DG, joined us as a Director and Treasurer. Don is an accomplished DXer and DXpeditioner, and he brings to the Foundation extensive financial expertise gained from his years as treasurer of a large corporation. Don holds DXCC #1 Honor Roll and 9-Band DXCC and is just shy of having 3,000 band-countries in the ARRL's DXCC Challenge program. Don is also a member of the CQ DX Hall of Fame.



In February, Ned Stearns, AA7A, was elected to fill the one remaining vacancy on NCDXF's Board of Directors. Ned, too, is an accomplished DXer and DXpeditioner. He holds DXCC #1 Honor Roll, 5B-WAZ, Satellite DXCC, and the first ever 11-Band DXCC (160 through 2 Meters inclusive). Ned has been a member and past chairman of the ARRL Contest Advisory Committee, is a present member of the ARRL DX Advisory Committee, a Vice Director of the ARRL's Southwestern Division and currently is serving his third term as President of the Central Arizona DX Association.

Don's and Ned's enthusiasm and knowledge of the DX community will be invaluable to NCDXF and we welcome them both to the Board.

A major area of concentration for NCDXF this year will be working to improve our finances. Given the present economy, our investment income is only "fair" compared to past years, and annual income from our contributor base is relatively flat. At the same time, the cost of DXpeditions to the really rare DX entities has escalated dramatically. The net effect of this is that we are not able to contribute as much as we would like to the DXpeditions we do support, and we have significantly pulled back on making grants to DXpeditions destined to only moderately rare DX entities.

We are planning a number of things to hopefully get contributions growing again. For starters, expect to see an increased presence from us at regional DX conventions. We want our Directors to attend these events so they can interact directly with the DX community. We believe there is no better way to make a case for why DXers should support the Foundation than by being there to personally explain what we do.

We have been collecting data from recent large DXpeditions and we see there is a huge population of DXers who work DXpeditions and request confirmations, but who do not presently contribute to NCDXF. We hope to go after this group with targeted e-mail and postal mail as a way to increase our contributor base.

We hope to get more DXers naming NCDXF as a beneficiary in their estate plans. We all know, unfortunately, that our DX fraternity is not getting any younger! We have heard many DXers say they want to "give something back" in appreciation for all the years of enjoyment they have received from DXing. A bequest to NCDXF is one really great way to do that.

A number of DX Clubs are strong financial supporters of NCDXF. They understand that the Foundation is well-equipped to deal with the multitude of grant requests received every year from would-be DXpedition organizers. They know NCDXF has the experience and expertise to separate legitimate requests from those simply seeking to have the DX community pay for their vacations, or from those not likely to succeed. Having NCDXF do that screening saves club officers countless hours because they no longer have to do it themselves — they simply refer all requests to NCDXF. In the months ahead, we hope to add even more clubs to our list of contributors by showing them the benefits to be gained from letting NCDXF do the work.

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The “Fabulous Four” who went in early to set up the stations. From left, HK1MW, HK1N, HK1T and HK6F.

that! In fact, Jorge decided we had a chance at the QSO world record for a non-hotel, non fly-in type DXpedition (the record was set by the 2008 Ducie Island DXpedition, VP6DX). After his return, Jorge contacted Gregg and me and said we needed more radios, amplifiers, antennas, generators and operators.

With that decision, the die was cast. I quickly sent a few emails and made a few phone calls and issued more invitations, growing the team to 20 operators. Like most DXpedition leaders, I have a list of people who I have been on DXpeditions with before and know people I can trust to do a good job under difficult circumstances. Looking at the HKØNA operator list, you will find relationships going back to 1997 that began at VKØIR. I did inherit some operators from the original team, and although they had little DXpedition experience, they were all successful contest operators.

### Safety first

Gregg, George Nicholson, N4GRN, and I flew to Cartagena, Colombia, the first week of November to meet with our Colombian counterparts and to make some critical decisions. We made friends easily and we all shared the belief that safety was our primary goal, and we would do everything possible to protect our

team from injury or worse. The near vertical island is difficult to access from the sea and there were incidents from previous DXpeditions there where team members were injured and in one instance, a near-fatality.

Faber, HK6F, is a safety/rescue expert in his profession and George, N4GRN, was on a cave rescue team years ago. Together they devised a plan to install a winch system to hoist people and equipment safely onto “El Tangon.” This is the structure put in place by the Colombian Navy some years ago to facilitate the re-supply and changing of the personnel stationed on the island.

Additionally, they decided to install safety cables at the more dangerous and difficult parts of the climb to further reduce risk to team members. As with most of the equipment used on the DXpedition, the necessary cables, clamps, harnesses, screws, etc. were purchased in the U.S. and shipped to Colombia via a freight forwarder in Miami.

Utilizing Yahoo Groups, team members became better acquainted as the plans for a successful DXpedition were discussed, modified and finalized. There were a lot of emails from team doctors (WØGJ, KØIR and primary physician, K9SG) urging us to get our old bodies in shape. The youngest team member was 24 (Manu Siebert, LU9ESD), the oldest, 74. This was to be a physically tough adventure for most of us.

### A head start

Four team members — Bolmar Aguilar, HK1MW; Faber Mosquera, HK6F; Jaime Gomez Rueda, HK1N, and Sal, HK1T — arrived on Malpelo in late December on the monthly Navy resupply ship ahead of the full team to establish the operating sites, put up the antennas, and set up radios, amplifiers and the generators. Although December was supposed to be the dry season, they were plagued with terrible weather, raining almost every day. They completely



A typical team meeting.



*Sunrise at operating site A.*

prepared operating site B (Op. B) and got about 40% of the antennas and equipment up on the mountaintop to operating site A (Op. A). On 10 January, when it was apparent that they had done about all they could do, and further progress was strictly weather-dependent, we told them to begin using the official HKØNA call sign. Using their own call signs, they made about 1,200 QSOs, but after they began using HKØNA, they made about 11,500 QSOs prior to the main team arriving on 21 January. This was part of our overall strategy to break the VP6DX record; more importantly, that decision gave DXers more time to get into the log.

The main team met in Bogotá on 18 January; for some it was for the first time. The next morning we flew to the port city of Buenaventura, checked into our hotel and began our first team meeting shortly afterward. Agenda items included the itinerary, safety procedures, equipment, antennas, power, and getting on and off the island. Additionally, Glenn Johnson, WØGJ, went over the computerized scheduling program that he and Robert Chudek, KØRC, had developed. It was really quite sophisticated and looked like it would solve our scheduling challenge.

The doctors each talked with us about our responsibilities to

both our teammates and ourselves. The biggest concerns were falls, broken limbs and sun-related illnesses; dehydration was a problem on Desecheo and we were briefed on warning signs in our teammates. We had set up a water cooler and icemaker at Op. B, making it easier to get a drink of water. Since most of the outdoor work was already completed at Op. B, that would keep us out of the sun as well.

## **Arrival**

Our charter vessel, the *SeaWolf*, transported us on the 24-hour transit to Malpelo, departing at 0400. I only remember the sound of the engines as we left Buenaventura and when we were in the open sea, the motion of the boat changed significantly. We had rough seas all the way and most of the team slept late, missing breakfast.

At 0500 the following morning,



*Looking down on to operating site B.*

the engines slowed as we raced top-side to get our first glimpse of “the rock.” It looked just like the pictures, except bigger. As the sun rose, we began ferrying men and their personal gear to “El Tangon.” Some climbed the rope ladder, but most were hoisted up like sacks of potatoes using the hoist system. Then, usually in groups of two or three, was the climb to the marine base, the location of Op. B. A few folks made it in 25 minutes or so, bragging that they made no stops; I, on the other hand, took 45 minutes and made eight stops to rest and hydrate. Eventually everyone made it up to our home for the next 16 days.

All the antennas were up, and the radios and amplifiers were neatly placed on tables lining the wall of the small building Jorge had negotiated for our use — six stations in all.

All this, because four guys we called the “Fabulous Four” went early to setup. We are all indebted to them and thankful for their sacrifice. That should include DXers worldwide because you had a longer opportunity to work us and hopefully put a new one in your logs.

### Up and running

While Gregg, W6IZT, loaded the final version of N1MM into all the



*K4UEE, going up the easy way.*

computers, several men set up two sleeping tents; others made interference checks among the stations. We were on the air at noon (local) the same the day we arrived. The pile-ups were huge as the No. 12 “most wanted” DXCC entity came on the air with six stations simultaneously. We implemented the computerized schedule that had been so painstakingly developed and began to settle into “DXpedition mode” i.e., sleep, eat, operate and do chores. The pileups would continue non-stop for 15 days.

We still had to get Op. A at the top up and running. We had purchased a sturdy operating tent at the last minute, checking it as excess baggage on the trip down. We feared that the operating site was so exposed to the weather, and because winds up to 60 mph had been observed the previous week, we were uncomfortable with the existing complement of tents. Several of our guys and four to five Marines carried the tent, a single generator, a couple of antennas, masts and personal gear to the top. Although the site was only 600 feet above Op. B, the climb was circuitous and dangerous. In those places where a slip and fall would have sent a man tumbling down the mountain, the “Fab 4” installed safety lines; the last 50 to 60 feet were the scariest.

The climb was virtually straight up, but the footing was secure rock and there were crevices to use as steps; in addition, a rope was installed to help pull you up. The climb would have been impossible for anyone other than an experienced mountain climber without the use of the rope. I was cautioned to never look down, and I didn’t until I



*HK1R getting to El Tangon the hard way.*

reached the top. I only went to Op. A once and I can appreciate the difficulty of the climb and the danger team members undertook to keep those four stations on the air. There were six to seven guys who basically manned Op. A off and on for 12 days. They would go up and stay

### Contributions

The **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA DX FOUNDATION** relies heavily upon the generosity of its members to fund various projects. We urge each member to consider making an annual contribution of US\$50 or its equivalent in foreign currency. However, we do not wish to exclude anyone from the **FOUNDATION** for financial reasons. If \$50 is not within your budget, then please give what other amount you can. Naturally, we welcome contributions in excess of \$50! The **NCDXF** is an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and all contributions are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law for U.S. taxpayers. Send your contribution to: **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA DX FOUNDATION**, P.O. Box 2012, Cupertino, CA 95015-2012, USA. You may also contribute and order supplies online via our secure server, visit [www.ncdxf.org/donate](http://www.ncdxf.org/donate).

for two to three days, operating with little sleep, then come down, shower and eat a meal or two, get some sleep and go back up. Primarily they were Jorge, HK1R (DXpedition organizer); Franz, DJ9ZB; Manu, LU9ESD, and Peter, PP5XX. Filling in on occasion were Ralph, KØIR; Glenn, WØGJ; Steve, VE7CT; Bob, N6OX; Sal, HK1T; Faber, HK6F, and Bolmar, HK1MW.

From Op. B we had a clear shot to the U.S. East coast, Europe and Africa. They were loud on Malpelo and we were loud on their end. Stations “behind” the mountain were significantly weaker, but workable, if they could hear us. Asia was our biggest challenge, but from Op. A it was a chip shot. I was told over and over that JAs were 20db to 30db over S9 on some bands while barely readable below at Op. B. All told we made 14,000 QSOs with Asia and for many it was a new one.

Not all of the team was able or inclined to pull shifts on the mountaintop, so our computerized scheduling that had been done in advance was out the window; instead, we took pen and paper and put a chart on the wall. The guys at Op. A did their own scheduling based upon who was “on top” and kept the three HF stations and a 6M station on the air almost around the clock. They had fewer



*Above: Rock & Roll on 10M (from left) HK1T, HK1MW, HK1R and HK1X. Right: Op. B operators in action (from left) HK1N, K4UEE and N6OX.*



operators to share the duty so they worked harder!

### Setting a record

At Op. B, we assessed our talent and the operators’ interests and crafted a schedule that seemed to satisfy everyone and maintain our QSO rates. When we realized that the “tent and generator” QSO record

was within reach, we had a meeting and decided to modify the schedule, using more experienced operators on more shifts and reducing shifts for the less experienced. For the following six days, some were pulling four to five three-hour shifts over a 24-hour period, while others were reduced to one or two. This enabled us to keep the daily rates high even as the demand for QSOs and the pileups began to diminish.

We collected the logs at each station once a day around noon and posted the cumulative number. We made between 12,000 and 15,000 QSOs per day, but it seemed we would never get there.

Op. A was shut down on 3 February and everything was brought down the mountain. It was sad in a number of ways, as their success was critical



*Battening down the hatches before the storm.*



Above: LU9ESD coming down from Op. A. Right: HK1MW climbing up to Op. A.



to our overall QSO count, and the team really didn't want it to end. They were literally at the top of the world with a view and radio conditions that were unequalled.

With everyone back at Op. B, there was not enough room for everyone to sleep, to say nothing of the fact that we now had too many operators. A decision was made to send the Op. A guys and a few others to the *SeaWolf* for some R&R and maybe a beer or two.

We kept four stations on the air until noon local time on 5 February and we were completely off the island by 1900 local time. The QSO total was 195,000-plus; we couldn't believe it ourselves!

### The team

We had 20 men from six countries, with the majority coming from Colombia and the United States. We spoke four different languages, although English was the language of convenience. There were times when we thought we were being understood and times we thought that we understood what was being said to us. Well, it didn't always work out that way. There were misunderstandings and differences of opinion and different cultural challenges, but to the team's credit, we worked through all of those challenges and all went home as

friends or, as the Colombians prefer, *compadres!*

It was a great adventure and everyone returned home safely with stories to be told and retold for years to come.

I want to close with a word about DXpedition funding, especially as it concerns the rare "most wanted" entities. They are rare for a reason. Usually there are political restrictions or they are geographically difficult to reach, or both. It's common for the DXpedition team members to pay 50% to 70% of the total costs of these kinds of DXpeditions, but the remainder must come from DX clubs, DXers and of course, DX foundations. NCDXF is always at the forefront of these expensive DXpeditions and without its financial help some DXpeditions would never take place. I urge you to please continue your support of the NCDXF and your other favorite DX foundations.



## Heavy Hitters 2011

We sincerely thank these supporters of the Northern California DX Foundation for their generous contributions during the calendar year 2011.



\$2,000-plus — Northern California DX Club; The YASME Foundation; Northern Illinois DX Association, and Southern California DX Club.



\$1,000 to \$1,999 — K2PLF, Martin Green, Jr.; KU9C, Steve Wheatley; W6JZH, John Galli, and Southeastern DX & Contesting Org.



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# President's desk *(continued)*

Finally, I cannot let this opportunity go by without publicly recognizing and thanking Bruce Butler, W6OSP, for his years of service to NCDXF. As of the first of this year, Bruce retired after serving nearly a quarter century variously as an NCDXF Director, Treasurer and President. We are deeply grateful to Bruce for his tireless efforts on behalf of the Foundation, and are pleased that he has agreed to become an NCDXF Advisor so that we still will have access to his wealth of knowledge to help guide us in the future.

As always, if you have comments or suggestions to help improve NCDXF, please contact me directly at my e-mail address. I would love to hear from you.

73,



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## DXPEDITION LENDING LIBRARY

The **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA DX FOUNDATION** has a number of VHS/DVD videos and Microsoft® PowerPoint presentations on CD-ROM



available for loan to organizations wishing to show them at their meetings. There is no charge to use the programs in the **FOUNDATION'S** library, but clubs borrowing materials are responsible for postage in both directions. To view the complete listing of programs available for your club's use, please visit our website, [www.ncdxf.org](http://www.ncdxf.org), and click on "Videos."

## Show your support for NCDXF

NCDXF offers several ways for you to show your love for DXing! Impress your friends with a gold lapel pin (\$7), show up at your next hamfest sporting the NCDXF hat (\$12) or don a NCDXF T-shirt (\$15) to set up your Yagi on Field Day. Send out your QSLs with an NCDXF label (roll of 500, \$7). Mail in the attached form or visit [www.ncdxf.org](http://www.ncdxf.org) to order today.



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