

Desecheo Island

KP5 — December 2005

By Kam Siragelden, N3KS

K3LP and I made our trip to Desecheo by ship, departing from a dock in Salinas located on the south side of Puerto Rico. The vessel was a 52-foot government-owned boat (with a government crew) designed for certain "undercover" tasks. We made a stop in Boqueron and eventually anchored south of Desecheo Island.

Using a dingy, we managed to land on the only spot that did not have reefs blocking access to the island—a 30-foot wide gap in the rocks located about 300 meters from where we planned to operate. Unloading equipment took a significant amount of time because the walk from the landing area to the operating area was over extremely rocky, uneven



A security boat cruises by for a look at our operation.



Our meager campsite on Desecheo Island.



The team stops at Boqueron on the way to KP5.

terrain. For antennas, we decided to use two SteppIR BigIR verticals for 40-10 meters. We constructed an 80-meter vertical using 35 feet of aluminum tubing combined with a 32-foot fiberglass mast. Wires for dipoles and spare masts were brought "just in case."

Our government hosts advised us we had to operate from the area on or around the helipad and would not be allowed to explore any other parts of the island. We were also told there are no snakes on the island, and that the Department of Natural Resources had in the recent past terminated the wild goat population because they were eating all of the local fauna.

Unloading the equipment took until the evening of December 15. At around 8PM local time, a CBP (Customs and Border Patrol) UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter swooped in and gave us a close look-over with a high power searchlight. They even landed their helo on the helipad and were going to investigate us, but then got radio word from our operations people that we were okay. With that, they immediately took off without checking us further. This incident caused us to decide to install our 80-meter antenna and other verticals as far away from the helipad as we were allowed. It would not be a pretty sight if the Blackhawk made another night landing on the pad and clipped the 80-meter vertical in the process!

The Pileups Begin

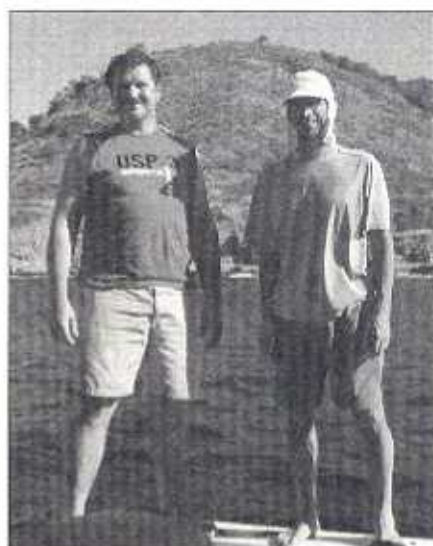
David decided to get some very much needed shut eye, while I used a piece of wire as a radial for the 80-meter verti-

cal and threw it in the sea. At 0410Z on 16 December I called CQ on 80-meter SSB and ABØX was the first station in our log. Signal reports from stateside appeared to be good; the 80-meter vertical was playing well. It took about 10 seconds before the pileup made it nearly impossible to pick out individual calls. Going by the numbers was the only way to maintain a decent rate. I worked a couple hundred stations on 80 before finally falling asleep.

We woke early the next morning and hiked to the landing area to drag over some more gasoline and water. One thing about Desecheo that bears mentioning is the number and fearlessness of the rat population. We lost some food to rats, and I had them climb up my leg on occasion. They don't seem to fear people at all.

By mid-morning we had the antennas assembled and were ready to operate most bands. K3LP had the patience to lay multiple radials under his vertical, while I just took a 40-foot piece of wire and ran it into the sea as my single radial. Although we never operated the same bands, it seems that the multiple radial approach improved Dave's signal considerably compared to mine, even though we were both next to the sea. Our operational plan was for me to work 80/30/20/10 meters while Dave worked 160 (unfortunately we never put up the 160 antenna) as well as 40-12 meters.

We operated to the limits of our exhaustion with minimal sleep till Saturday afternoon, and then began the process of breaking down our equipment. This took




Kam and Dave after departing the island.



The author at his operating position.

until well past dark and became a very dangerous endeavor. The surf was up to 5-feet which made dingy operations nearly impossible. Our ship illuminated the landing zone with a spotlight to enable us to load and navigate out of the cove. We eventually got equipment and personnel back on board without injury. The vessel stayed in Western Puerto Rico waters for the rest of the night and we slept on-board. On Sunday morning we headed back toward Salinas.

A Good Return for a Short Operation

We made 7229 QSOs on seven bands with 1614 on CW and 5615 on SSB. We regret not making as many QSOs in Europe and Asia as we would have liked. The combination of exhaustion and unexpected shortened operation prevented us from taking the time to round out the log with more areas of the world. Our congratulations to those who did manage to work us, and our apologies again to those who did not get the chance. 

The

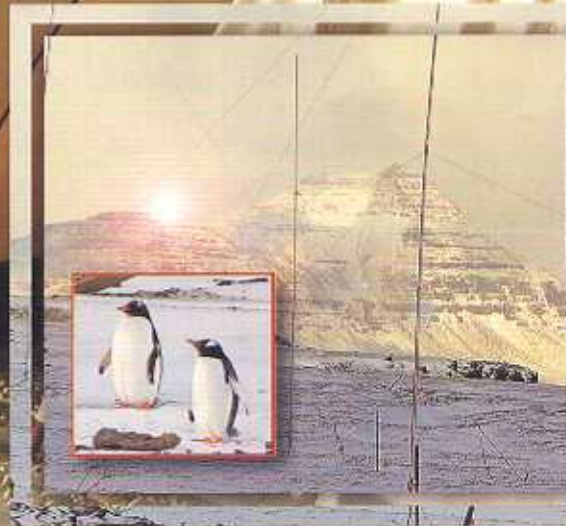


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YEARBOOK 2005

*Inside: Journey to
Desecheo Island and
2005: The Year
in Review*



DXCC Yearbook

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