

Chasing DX, continued

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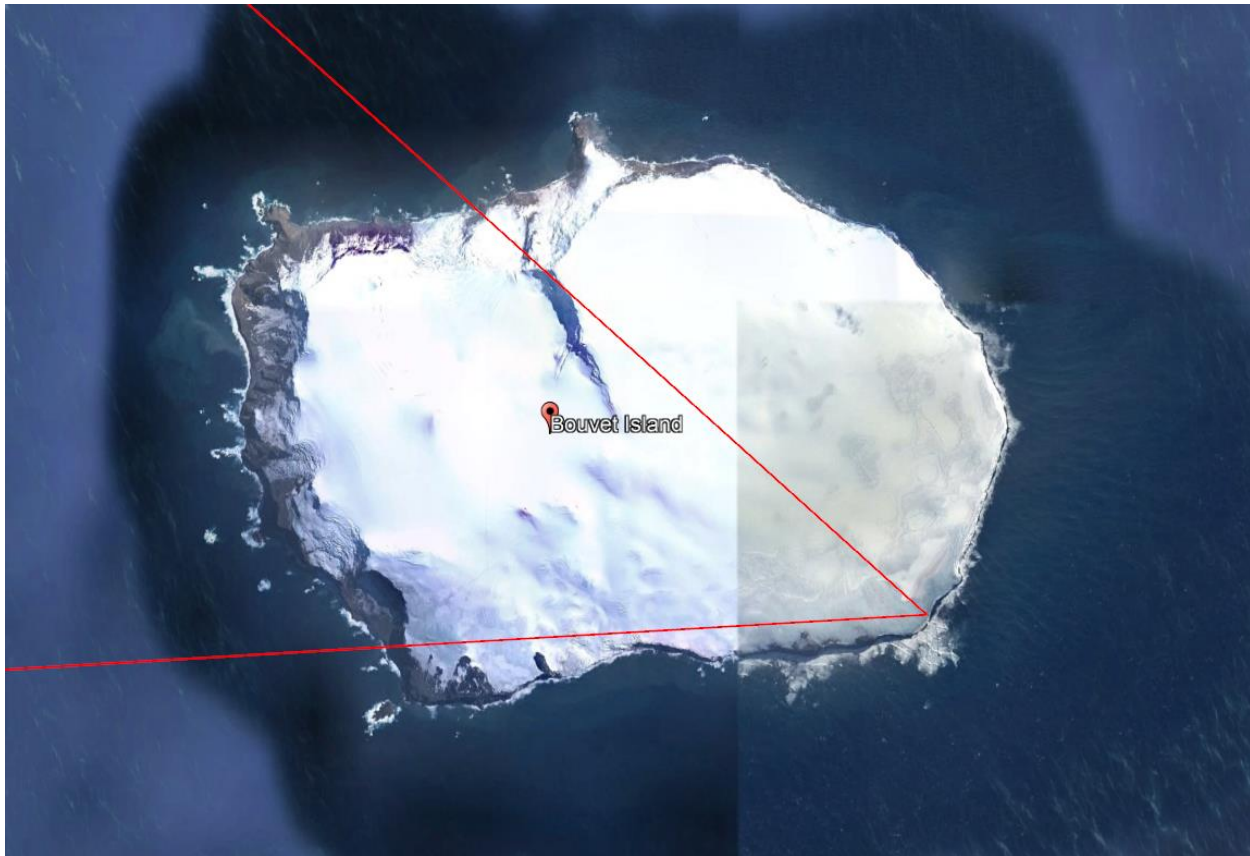
Last newsletter, I wrote about getting the DX bug with the uptick in Cycle 25 solar activity and DX-peditions to Bouvet and Crozet Islands. These are the second and third most wanted DXCC entities in the world. These DX-peditions have had drastically different outcomes as I will describe below.

First, the bad news – Bouvet Island. This DX-pedition seemed behind the curve since it left The Falklands and sailed to Bouvet on the Marama. I fully expected that they might be on the air as early as my birthday – January 27th. That would have been quite the gift! However, it was not to be and four members of the team first landed on the island on January 31st. They came ashore at Cape Fie, on the southeast side of the island – more on that later. The plan was to land but return to the boat overnight before spending the next day bringing much of the equipment ashore. Heavy seas prevented their return to the boat and they spent the night on the island without shelter, sleeping equipment or heat. It was the second day before they could get more gear ashore. The initial four who landed spent four days on Bouvet but had to return to the ship in advance of a storm with 60 knot winds. They were never able to fully provision the island for the intended operating conditions and plans were made plans for a greatly scaled-down operation upon return to the island.

It was not until February 6th that radio operations commenced from Bouvet – 15M SSB and 12M CW at 100W using only wire antennas. 30M was added that same day and by the next day they had setup on 20M as well. Power was from gasoline-powered Honda generators, the more powerful diesel generators and RF amplifiers were never landed. Operating conditions were very poor with operators sitting on the ground and radios on upside-down buckets. Some conspiracy theorists to spread rumors that the team had not actually landed, but were operating the radios remotely from the Marama.

There were hams QRM'ing 3Y0C operating frequencies for some inexplicable reason. There was no internet or GPS on the island so the computers clocks were off by as much as 14 seconds! This caused 3Y0J to be operating on the odd cycle of FT8 instead on the even cycle reserved for "foxes" in fox / hound mode. And, of course, there were the usual FT8 operators who do not understand fox / hound, time cycles, how to use the waterfall or who just thought that it would be a great idea to call CQ alongside 3Y0J messing things up. I listened several times on FT8 frequencies when alerted by spotting sites or the TDXS email list and never picked up a decodable signal.

One TDXS member (Matt, KM5VI) argued that their choice of Cape Fie made it difficult to get a short path signal into North America except the west coast. Cape Fie was chosen due to the ability to make a beach landing. Other DX-peditions in 2003 and 1989 / 1990 operated from Nyroysa and used helicopters to go ashore. The highest point (~2000') on Bouvet is near the center of the island and directly in the short path to North America. The island geometry requires a minimum takeoff angle of 8 – 10° to clear the mountains, too high to reach into North America. The lines on the figure below show the short path to the east and west coasts of the US. Long path over the ocean allowed low takeoff angle signals to propagate towards North America unimpeded. Despite these issues, several Houston area guys were able to work 3Y0J.



On February 14th after 8 days of operation, the supply of gasoline for the Honda generators ran out and radio operations ceased. Per ClubLog, 3Y0J made 18,845 QSO's with 8,597 unique callsigns. The original goal was 200,000 QSO's over their permitted operation of 22 days! Obviously, there were a lot of dupes in the QSO list despite the 3Y0J operators asking those that already made QSO's to let others have a shot.

Not to take anything away for the 3Y0J team's efforts, but in my opinion, the team was overly optimistic and under-prepared for what they faced in making a shore landing on Bouvet. While hindsight is 20-20, there were good reasons why previous DX-peditions used helicopter landings and located on the northwest side of the island. I hope that am still around when another team takes up this challenge.

Now for the good news, I was able to use the resources described in last month's article to make a QSO with FT8WW on Crozet Island. On February 17th, a little before 0300 UTC, I saw FT8WW spotted on the DXMaps spotting page ([DXMaps-FT8WW](#)) at 14.085 MHz. I tuned in and saw a faint undecodable signal at 360Hz on the wsjt-x waterfall. Over the next 20 – 30 minutes the signal grew much stronger and decoded easily. I called several times with 75W and was rewarded with +01s/n reply to his +03 s/n signal. It was all over in a matter of minutes and then he QSY'ed to the CW portion of the band. It's all about preparation meeting opportunity for good DX, although a little luck helps too!