

HEARD ISLAND

The 2016 Cordell Expedition

VKØEK

Discovering Life and Links in the Extremes

THE HEARD ISLAND EXPEDITION EXPERIENCE

Yes, the 2016 Heard Island is a major amateur radio event, and yes, it involves a major environmental project to discover new species and document major changes due to global warming. But the project is *much more* than these parts. The project offers to its participants and supporters a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be part of a Voyage of Discovery, to be a personal experience that likely will never be repeated. It will change their lives.

In this issue we share some of the reasons these people came together to carry out this extraordinary journey. These are their words, unedited and unabridged. There is room for only about half the team; a future issue will feature the other half. We invite you to vicariously share this adventure by identifying with one or more of the participants; it could change your life as well!

DAVE LLOYD K3EL

My interest in going to Heard Island came into focus in December, 2012, as



I was sat on the deck of the yacht Ewohe with other members of the ZL9HR DXpedition to Campbell Island. We were at anchor in Perseverance Harbour, a wonderfully sheltered natural anchorage which cuts deep into this sub-Antarctic island. On the way to Campbell the Southern Ocean had given us all a lesson in our own insignificance and mortality, but a few days of operating the pileups allowed us to forget the rigors of the voyage and so we discussed the "next one". We considered many of ham radio's "most wanted", and of these varied possibilities, the target which resonated most with me was Heard Island.

When I later learned of a proposed expedition to Heard, I couldn't refuse this rare opportunity. Few people ever set foot on a sub-Antarctic island, to be chased by sea-lions or commune with an

"...the target which resonated most with me was Heard Island."

albatross. Yet, even by the standards of these remote places, Heard is seldom visited. Although it is not on the way to anywhere, a mix of amateur radio and scientific research pro-

vide good reasons to make the voyage to Heard Island. Although I am a scientist by training and profession, my focus on this expedition will not be field work or research. My primary role on the Heard Island team is to do my best to ensure that if you want a QSO with Heard Island - be it ATNO, band fill, or just for sport - you will have a good chance to make that contact. See you in the pileups!

JIM COLLETTA N6TQ



The Heard Island Expedition appeals to me on several dimensions. First, the trip aligns to my passion for adventure, having spent six weeks in the Himalaya (1998), two weeks trekking and honeymooning in the jungles of Laos (1999), four weeks tracking rhinos in Namibia (2000), summing Tanzania's Kilimanjaro Volcano (2002) and, most recently, operating from the remote Tuli Preserve in eastern Botswana (2014).

Secondly, having been a ham radio operator for over forty years, where the vast majority of my time was spent chasing the DX, I feel it

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is my time to give back to the ham community and be the DX. Admittedly, because of the financial commitment, the time commitment

and the (harsh) environmental commitment, Heard Island only really

appeals to a select few crazies and I am honored to have been invited and am highly motivated, like the rest of our Heard Island team, to rise to the challenge and work as many hams as possible for ATNOs. I had a small taste of this, while operating as A25TQ in September 2014 and thirst for another opportunity.

Thirdly, having spent a stint in the U.S. Coast Guard and growing up in ocean sailing family, forty years later, I can still hear my father recounting various Southern Ocean stories, so the opportunity to traverse these same waters appeals to my inner core. Lastly, having an ocean engineering degree and a scientific mindset, I like the blended (part radio-part science) nature of this expedition.

So, when I'm not operating, I envision collecting samples, searching for new life forms, measuring the glacier melt, or performing some other scientific task to help others, who are not as fortunate as I, to learn from this unique - seldom traveled ecosystem on Heard Island.

[HANS-PETER BLATTNER](#) [HB9BXE](#)

Why have I signed up to participate in the VKØEK expedition?

There are two primary reasons:

Even back in my childhood I was interested in foreign countries and cultures. While a young child, I got a copy of a book by Rene Gardi (a Swiss travel author) in which he wrote about Africa.



I could never let go of the thought that I might one day also travel there, and in fact during 1975/76 I started on a trip with my current XYL in our own VW bus, going from Lucerne to Cape Town. For six months we passed through many European countries and followed Rene Gardi's trail through central Africa; we even visited the native inhabitants, the pygmies.

Two years before that, I relocated to South Africa and worked as a toolmaker for six months. I was uncomfortable with the apartheid that was so dominant back then, so I returned home, but in doing so I took a number of detours through various African countries.

In 1978 my XYL and I made another trip, this time through Asia. For half a year we again traveled with our own VW bus from Lucerne through Turkey, Afghanistan, Nepal up to the border of Burma and back through southern India.

Besides the many interesting observations about the different countries and peoples, on such a trip each day you are confronted with problems, some small and some large. This is a challenge I enjoy. The situation was similar on my previous ham radio expeditions, and thus for my entire life I will be interested in taking part in such adventures.

I am not enthusiastic about organized trips. I prefer to determine myself when, where and for how long.

My professional career has taken a similar route. If I found that my work became too routine, I changed my job. As a result, I left "traces" in my previous areas of work, all of which are characterized by innovation. Thus it is not surprising that I have spent my most recent time working as an electrical engineer in product development and have been granted several patents.

As an active DXer (DXCC Honor Roll), I would like to give something back to the DX community.

One aspect of the VKØEX expedition that partic-

ularly fascinates me is the parallel expedition "Science and Ham Radio". Because of this, I will be able to learn many new, interesting things in the fields of biology and geology. You also have the opportunity to get to know many fascinating crew members who you might otherwise never get the chance to meet.

I hope I will be able to make a major contribution to the VKØEK team with my technical experience in dealing with antennas and transceivers along with CW operating. Of course, I also look forward to addressing any problems that might arise and help solve them.

"All aspects of the expedition will be a greater challenge than any of my previous endeavors"

Based on my current knowledge of Heard Island I expect to focus on three regions

of the island if conditions permit: Atlas Cove, Laurens Peninsula, and the coast between Spit Bay and Winston Lagoon. These locations can be reached on foot from the two proposed sites for radio operations. In each region I plan to examine the characteristics of recently deglaciated land and to inspect it for growth of bryophytes such as *Polytrichastrum alpinum* while possibly addressing the question of how soon after deglaciation such plants begin to take root. I also will attempt to identify vascular plants wherever they may appear, being on the lookout for any species new to Heard Island. My most specific goal is to follow up on the discovery in 2003/04 of Heard Island's twelfth vascular plant species (*Leptinella plumosa*) in Paddick Valley near Winston Lagoon. At that time only a single specimen was documented. We might be able to learn if this species has increased in number at that location, died off, or spread to adjacent areas. Finally, if there is any volcanic activity at the time of our visit and the lava is accessible, I will collect specimens.

[FRED BELTON KM4MXD](#)

When I was a kid in Memphis, Tennessee, my father hung a map of the world in my room and I became fascinated with the remote



islands of the Indian Ocean - little specks in all that blue, on the opposite side of the world. I later traveled to some of those islands and climbed the volcanoes on Reunion and Grand Comore, but never reached the Subantarctic Islands. I resolved that someday I would explore one of them. I climbed dozens of volcanoes around the world and organized expeditions to Tanzania's Ol Doinyo Lengai volcano. Lengai is unique because it produces natrocarbonatite lava, with a composition that sometimes changes significantly from one eruption to the next. A set of specimens I collected there in 2008 contained a hybrid

natrocarbonatite never previously documented. A dozen climbs of Lengai, with more than 3 months spent in the active crater, led to my co-authorship of journal articles on mineralogy, remote thermal sensing of volcanic activity, and speleology. I also visited Iceland often and trekked to nearly every remote geothermal area and lava field. Four extended treks to a remote area near Síðujökull at the NE end of Lakagigar allowed me to observe a retreating glacier adjacent to lava flows supporting predominately bryophyte and lichen vegetation. I observed vegetation becoming established in recently deglaciated areas and saw some degradation caused by human disturbance such as trampling and off-road driving.

Joining the Heard Island expedition was an obvi-

ous choice for me because it is perfect for my interests and experience, and it presents an opportunity to contribute to the understanding of a rarely visited and rapidly altering environment. It will be a chance to witness effects of significant climate change in an area that, unlike even the remotest parts of Iceland, is mostly free from the effects of human activity. I was also attracted by the fact that all aspects of the expedition will be a greater challenge than any of my previous endeavors in Iceland or anywhere else.

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[ARLISS THOMPSON W7XU](#)



I've had an interest in the Arctic and Antarctic since early grade school and recall reading all I could find at the time about polar exploration. I wanted to become a polar explorer although I eventually figured out there isn't a big job market for explorers at this point in history.

My interest in far-away places never really went away, and was rekindled in high school when I got my ham license. I wasn't working much DX with the simple station I had at the time, but that didn't stop me from dreaming of operating from exotic locations, particularly those in the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic.

Some years later I was able to combine my interests in the polar regions and radio when I was

hired to be the chief radio operator at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole station. I would rank the day I first landed in Antarctica as the most exciting day in my life, and I was still excited about the continent a year later when my stay there ended.

Although I've made a couple of trips north of the Arctic Circle since then, and have participated in a number of small Dxpeditions (FY, 8R, CEØY, 9G, TZ, C5, CY9, J3, VP2V, FJ and VP8), I haven't been back to the Antarctic or sub-Antarctic since I was at the Pole. Therefore, when the opportunity arose to travel to a sub-Antarctic location as rare as Heard Island, I jumped at the chance.

Part of the appeal of going to Heard Island is that it combines my interests in the polar regions, radio and the biologic sciences (although I am presently a semi-retired physician, I have an undergraduate degree in Wildlife Science). On top of that, having spent some time aboard vessels in the Bering Sea and eastern Pacific, I am looking forward to sailing the Indian Ocean to and from Heard Island. All together, I anticipate this DXpedition will provide not only a wonderful opportunity to hand out contacts from a very rare location to as many amateurs as possible, it will be a great personal adventure and there is the opportunity to contribute to the scientific knowledge of Heard Island as well. What more could you ask for?

BILL MITCHELL AEØEE

I first learned about the Heard Island Expedition at a local ham radio club meeting while I was a doctoral student in chemistry at UC Berkeley, and was hooked instantly. My dissertation research focused on uranium-lead dating of rocks, and I enjoyed going out to the field.



It can be a lot of work and the quarters may not be luxurious, but the outcrops and science are definitely worth it (glaciers! volcanoes! mantle plume?!). Beyond geoscience, I am a birder—participating in the eBird citizen science project—and am fond of atmospheric science, meteorology, and photography.

Heard Island has so much to offer to those interests that I'll probably end up being disappointed at how short the expedition will be. I want to have a meteorological station on the island, to send up

"Heard Island has so much to offer to those interests that I'll probably end up being disappointed at how short the expedition will be."

weather balloons (major sponsor needed), map the extent of glaciation and vegetation, count birds (especially rockhopper penguins), and collect rock and soil samples for geological and geochemical analysis.

I also want to take a lot of pictures of rocks, animals, plants and meteorological phenomena. Of course, like many of the other expedition members, I will carry out some experiments to sound out the distances over which radio communication is possible on various frequencies between 1.8 MHz and 30 MHz.

To prepare, I have been writing a blog (<https://inquisitiverockhopper.wordpress.com>) and posting shorter thoughts on Twitter (@i_rockhopper). Check those out for more information on my Heard Island (and general) science interests.

GAVIN MARSHALL VK2BAX

My next adventure? I'm going to Heard Island in March 2016!

Why would you want to go to Heard Island? And just remind where Heard Island is again?

That's how quite a few conversations get started for me at present.



For about 3 years now the Heard Island expedition, in different guises, has been a "maybe" for me. This year the level of certainty has been climbing and now - I'm confirmed as 1 of the 14 on the trip leaving Cape Town on 10 March 2016.

For the past 3-4 years I've been enjoying the opportunity to return to the outdoors and the "adventure" level has gone beyond local trekking. In the last few years I've been chasing the "7 summits" and the current status is a successful summit of Kilimanjaro (Africa), Kosciusko (Australia), Elbrus (Europe) and Aconcagua (South America). Added to that I've made 2 unsuccessful trip to Denali (Mth America) and along the way enjoyed some amazing travel experiences getting to and from the mountains.

And to do all of this I have been supported by my family who have put up with disappearing for weeks on end, and then returning with ideas for new adventures.

So why Heard Island?

At some point in the past a web search turned up "Heard Island" and that lead to "Cordell Expedi-

tions" and that ended with me emailing and asking for a place on the expedition team.

Heard Island 2016 is another extreme adventure. When I think about it there's no one single reason, but I keep coming back to this group of reasons that collectively get me excited to be included –

- ◆ Heard Island is remote and the conditions extreme. Here's a chance to pit myself against the environment and see how I come off. I'm expecting it to be a full on challenge.
- ◆ Heard Island is effectively untouched by man. I keep reading and hearing that but I want to understand that by being there. There are very few people who have been to Heard Island. It's a small club I'm joining.
- ◆ The mix of wildlife that I'll experience is something I'll be lucky to encounter anywhere in the world.

In a nutshell – it's one big adventure and I can't miss the opportunity – it's unlikely to present itself again.

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KENNETH KARR NG2H

WHAT WAS I THINKING?!

This came to mind when telling my friends about the detailed preparation needed to execute our expedition to Heard Island. Rhetorical perhaps, but I'll try to answer it. (It also redefines going "south for the winter" ... we don't stop in Florida!).



We will spend three weeks on Heard Island, a unique uninhabited scientific and environmental "laboratory" located in the sub-Antarctic. It is over 2500 miles SE of Cape Town, SA, our embarkation port aboard the research vessel R. B. Braveheart, and almost the same distance SW of Fremantle, Australia, where we will complete our 44 day adventure. It has an active volcano (9000 foot "Big Ben") 14 glaciers, and indigenous flora/fauna with an estimated 200 or more species yet to be identified.

What interests me? People, places, and things. I'm curious. It doesn't take much to interest me if it's something new. Here's my "short list:" Interesting people, great teams, science, far away places, exploring, plants, animals, the environment (islands, glaciers, volcanoes), the arts, radio (DX, contesting, rag chewing) and the sea.

What was I thinking when I applied to become a member of the Heard Island expedition? "Wow! I



THE HEARD ISLAND PROJECT

The Heard Island Project is centered around an expedition to Heard Island, lying at 53°S 73°E in the Southern Ocean. The island is extremely isolated, and very seldom visited.

The project will include an ambitious amateur radio operation using the callsign **VKØEK**, and a variety of scientific investigations under the title "Discovering Life and Links in the Extremes."

The expedition team of 14 will sail on or around March 10, 2016, from Cape Town, South Africa, spend up to 21 days on Heard Island, and end the voyage at Fremantle, Western Australia.

don't think I could put together so many of my interests in one package ... I could check off half of my "bucket list!"

What was I thinking after I applied? "I hope they'll accept an old salt like me."

What am I thinking now that the team has accepted me? I better be prepared and be a proficient contributor to the team. It's an important DXpedition and it is also an important contribution to our scientific knowledge:

"...interesting people, great teams, science, far away places, ..., the environment, ..., DX, contesting, ..."

electromagnetic propagation, satellite communications, innovative computer applications, environment (weather, glacial movement, volcanic effects), new plants and animals, and the "unknown unknowns" we're likely to uncover. That's what I'm thinking!

VADYM IVLIEV UT6UD

My reasons why I should go with VKØEK to Heard Island:

"Remember, Days Are Numbers" (From The Alan Parsons Project song "The traveller")



In my early childhood, when I was living close to a big seaport I was impressed by the stories of seamen about mysterious faraway Antarctic islands,

there were whales, albatrosses and the deep, cold sea. I had received as a gift some coins from Kerguelen Island and I would daydream while looking at them. As a young child I was excited

by the idea to explore a closet behind the kitchen at my family home, so later, when the years passed, I started to recognize that the whole planet is my home, and I must expand the range of my explorations to its limit in searching for most distant places.

The time came, after almost 40 years, when I started again to think about the chance to visit

the Southern Ocean. On the advice of a French fellow Ham I contacted the French Antarctic

Administration TAAF with the aim to register on the waiting list as a tourist on board a Scientific Vessel and they promised to put me on waiting list for the Marion Dufresne II. But, fortunately, I found out about plans for VKØEK and I decided to take a chance to make my dream come true by sailing to even more remote place, Heard Island.

I'm sure, it's going to be not only a great life experience, but it's very important for my scientific knowledge. I want to learn more from the members of the great team of men, who are energetic, motivated, experienced, full of vim and vigor being zealous Ham Radio operators, researchers and travellers.

I feel a thrill anticipating the prospect of future achievements by application of scientific investigation on the island, having in mind real practical applications of my work.

Another reason is simple curiosity. I like to stay open for the new discoveries, to make a contribution to the progress of Radio Amateur sport and science by gathering information important from scientific perspective and personal perspectives, and of course I look forward to learn more about myself.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR...

We would welcome your letters and notes regarding the VKØEK DXpedition and the scientific program. You could make a comment, or you could ask a question and we will do our best to answer. Obviously we can't publish them all, nor in their entirety, but we would like to give you a chance to be heard about Heard (!), and can give you a few minutes of fame!



Please send your contributions to: newsletter@heardisland.org.

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