

Indian with Global Friends in Andaman DXpedition

Sarath Babu Rayaprollu, VU3RSB



Frank, DL4KQ, (organizer of various dxpeditions). Participated in T33C, T3Ø, 3D2, XY, XU, 4S7 expeditions. His VU4 DX-pedition callsign is VU4AN/VU3FRK and made 35 QSOs to begin the operation and handed over to others. He took up the responsibility of representing our group at the Hamfest as well as organizing the group.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands situated in the Indian Ocean are the most sought-after location for a DXpedition by the International Ham Radio Community. During the end of the Andaman DXpedition in December 2004, a powerful earthquake followed by a killer tsunami struck the region and the members of the DXpedition got down to business by providing extensive wireless communication which helped the major rescue operation, right in the middle of the chaos. The communication provided was so exhaustive, authentic and critical

that the world media and the governing bodies took note of the voluntary service provided by the expedition team.

It took more than a year to have the next Amateur Radio operation from the Andaman Islands in connection with the VU4 Hamfest organized by the National Institute of Amateur Radio (NIAR). Both the Indian and DX Hams were permitted to operate. OM Sarath (VU3RSB) was specially invited to be present among the biggest DX Ham groups of all, to operate as part of their team. There were approximately 40 Hams from 15 different countries and about 60 Indian Hams traveled to Pt. Blair.



Bernd, DL5OAB, CW Operator. Participated in T33C, T30, 3D2, XY, XU expeditions. Joined the team on 21 April and could spend less time on Radio; made 213 contacts.

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Sarath, VU3RSB, SSB/ Digital Operator. Participated in the famous 2004 VU4 expedition. He logged 2,418 QSOs including digital communication contacts. The duration was less than 20 hours long. Sarath was able to achieve 159 WPX zone prefixes and he worked all the call areas of DL, JA, JH, JR, W & I countries. Moreover his responsibility was team logistics as well as coordination in the venue.

A Rare Opportunity

For OM Sarath, it was a rare opportunity of working with International Hams from Germany, USA, Italy and France. It was a one-of-a-kind expedition; an Indian Ham got to participate in an international group and got the hands-on experience. The team consisted of 10 well-known members, which was a nice



Claudia, K2LEO, Digital Modes, Participated in T33C, 3D2, 9H, J45, T3Ø, TY expeditions. She made approximately 637 contacts in Digital Mode.

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Doug, N6TQS, Digital Modes.
Participated in T33C, VP6DIA, K1B, SO5X, XRØX, FOØAAA expeditions. Worked only on digital mode and could only make 268 contacts as most of the time poor band conditions hampered the propagation and also he had to share the operation with K2LEO.

blend of youth and experience among the Ham Fraternity. OM Frank, DL4KQ, from Germany meticulously planned the expedition. OM Sarath took upon the responsibility of local coordination, logistics and valuable advice. It was acknowledged by all team members that without his local knowledge and contacts the DXpedition group could never have operated so successfully.

Expedition

OM Frank sent the details of the equipment that was to be carried and who was to bring what equipment and requested their travel itinerary. The same was verified and revised schedule was sent to everyone. The first group, consisting of OM Frank, OM Joe, OM Doug, OM Andrea and YL Claudia, reached Chennai on 14 April 2006 some of them had already traveled 48 hours. OM Sarath went by Spice Jet from Hyderabad to Chennai and due to delay of the flight he missed the scheduled meeting with Frank and others. Sarath then logged on to WI-FI network of airport with high speed and he had a very good time talking to Bernd, DL5OAB, and Bernie, W3UR, Randy, WX5L, etc for four hours and after that went in search of team members who were to leave for Port Blair.

As soon as all the members gathered, they left Chennai by Air Deccan — which had more Hams than others. The

Captain of the flight was nice enough to visit the Hams during the flight while waiting for the landing clearance and gave a tour of many of the islands visible from the air. Everyone was filled with joy when the flight landed at Port Blair. Unfortunately Sarath's Spider Beam was damaged, as it was wrongly stored inside the cargo compartment and there was no response from the Air

Deccan even after an argument over the incident. Meanwhile Sarath had asked the other members to proceed to the resort — called Ripple Resort — which was reserved for them earlier.

Later the group members Sarath Frank, Doug, Andrea, and Claudia assembled at the resort and then left for the pre-determined site where the DXpedition was to be organized. Late

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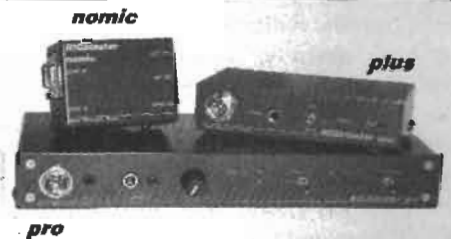
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Andrea, IK1PMR, CW Operator, participated in T33C, T3Ø, 3D2, 6O, J45, TY, 9H expeditions. Spent maximum time on CW / Digital and was able to make 4324 contacts. He left the Islands on 25 April.

in the day Joe joined them. It was a real DXpedition site with basic tents and all other basic amenities and the location was so good with a clear view for setting up an Amateur Radio station to make contacts. As darkness engulfed the area, they returned to the hotel for dinner.

On 15 April all the members from Ripple Resort and Joe from the government guest house moved to the Megapode Nest Camping Resort, which was identified for operation and accommodation spot for the DXpedition. It was the most ideal site in Port Blair for Ham Radio and the arrangement for accommodation was done as per the plan of the expedition. Basic tent, fan, television, double bed etc were provided — unlike sitting in hotel and DXing out of an air conditioned room. On the third day all the DXers had a tough time due to the lack of water at the resort and during the day the water used to get so hot that one could not take a shower nor even wash hands.

The countdown began for setting up antennas and sites! As there were no big masts for beams as well as other antennas the best bamboo available in Port Blair was bought and used and we began erecting the antennas. In the evening they had a get-together and discussed plans of station setup as well as antennas, etc. It was decided that the group would meet and discuss regularly at breakfast, lunch and dinner.

OM Sarath's Spider beam was reconstructed with great difficulty and was erected for 160-10 Meters. A vertical at a corner was erected and at the other corner other vertical for all-bands was

erected by Frank and Sarath. The daytime temperature was so terribly high that only these two were able to work for a longer time under the scorching April Sun on the hilltop.

Doug erected the Sigma 5 for Digital and Joe the HyGain vertical 10-40 Meter. Flo and Sylvain, two young French Hams, arrived on the 17th and worked extremely hard without proper sleep or meals. That evening they put up a 5-element 5-band spider Yagi and another 5-element WARC Yagi.

Almost all the antennas were ready with initially four operational sites. For Sarath the local logistics were the main duties, which kept him busy all day. If not for his knowledge on local shopping of materials like ropes, additional coax cables, poles, batteries and so on, the setup time could have been doubled!



Joe, AA4NN, CW Operator. Participated in T33, T3Ø, 3D2, XY4, BQ9, BV9, A25, C91 expeditions Joe was able to work 1933 contacts (like his Year of Birth) during his operation.



Sylvain, F4EGD, SSB Operator. Participated in TMØHQ expedition He made 3362 on SSB Mode and spent maximum time inside the SSB Tent.

Frank was busy being our Hamfest organizing member hence he could not contribute much with further setup after 17 April and he had very little time for Ham operations. On the 18 April 2006 at 00.00 hours Frank made the first QSO on CW and later made lot of QSOs for an hour or so and handed over the microphone to others who started working on different bands and on different modes.

Though not all the bands were open with good propagation, they were successful in working on all modes and at any given time at least one band was operational. Initially they had 40M and 80M bands open, so only two stations were operational.

On the 18th morning everyone had left for the Hamfest and Frank requested that Sarath take care of the camp and keep at least one station running. Sarath began with the SSB mode to take advantage of the conditions on different bands as well as to make maximum use of the time available. He was quite efficient and could successfully make more than 800 contacts in four hours of operation. The kind of expertise he had gained by working with the international Hams was tremendous and his capabilities were widely acknowledged by everyone as a very good SSB DXpedition operator.

On 22 April the weather started to get worse due to a cyclone approaching the islands. The weather deteriorated because of the cyclone's heavy rains, which damaged the tents and the vertical antenna. The thunder and lightning associated with heavy rainfall hampered our operations. The bad weather lasted for three days causing power blackouts and therefore less time on the bands. After the weather improved, we re-

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Flo, F5CWU, CW/SSB Operator, Participated in P40, 3D2, T33, T30, T19M, TY9F expeditions. Flo mainly worked on CW and spent time on SSB also. He made 3,853 contacts during the course of operation. Before the start of operation it was decided that Flo would be QSL Manager for the DXpedition.

erected the dipoles and verticals.

Many of the groups who operated from the islands were not affected with the power blackouts that caused us to lose two days of our operation. Moreover we lost two days for Hamfest. Ultimately, our four out of eight days of permitted operation resulted in a total of 19,424 contacts. With just less than 100-Watt power with the spider beams and verticals, we achieved these many contacts because of the excellent location for the DXpedition.

We thank the ANIDCO for choosing and setting up the tents near the sea coast which helped the operation to be a grand success.

What else happened at Pt. Blair?

Frank and I decided to visit the college where I had the opportunity to work in 2004 and made more than 16,000 contacts. This place is memorable for me and I have received news of two of lecturers who got their Ham Radio license which is real dream for many enthusiasts.

When we visited the college, we found that they had no radios for the YL Hams who received their licenses which left them with no opportunity to operate during the expedition. We decided to leave my radio and put up a vertical antenna to give them hands-on experience before they got their own radios.

After finishing our operation, Doug,

N6TQS, donated his vertical antenna to the college. Team members donated their coax cables and Frank was instrumental and generous enough to donate his K2 Transceiver with the support of fellow Hams namely DF2IC, DL5OAB, DL8GX, EUDXF and GM DX Group. Finally Andamans now has a permanent station at the B. R. Ambedkar Polytechnic College setup by our group.

Hamfest Summary

Due to the request by the group to take care of the operation site Sarath could not attend the Hamfest and can only give the secondhand account received by others. The Hamfest was inaugurated under the auspices of His Excellency, the Lt. Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Many more dignitaries attended the function and sessions with lectures given by International and Indian Hams. Some 40 international and 60 Indian Hams visited the Hamfest and many of them were honored on this occasion.

The American Radio Relay League, USA sent the prestigious "International Humanitarian Award" for the VU4 Team members-2004 with which OM Sarath was an active member. All the team members were present except D. Varun Sastry in Port Blair and Mrs. Bharathi, VU2RBI, received the awards on behalf of the team.

Later on many high officials from Indian Ministries as well as from the A&N Administration did visit different camp sites for gathering detailed information about Ham Radio and its benefit for the public. At the end of the Hamfest OM Sarath's DXpedition group declared their satisfaction about a very joyful event and that all appreciated the generosity of the GOI to permit



David, K3LP, CW/SSB Operator. Participated in KP5, 8P9, T33, T30, 3D2, FS, J6, 5H3 expeditions. David joined the team a bit later and was able to make 2,381 contacts during his operation time.

VU4 operation after the restless work of NIAR.

Good-Bye Andaman Islands

Mr. Ajeer Vidya, J.S. & Financial Adviser's initiative after his visit to Dayton in 2005 and various other Ham Conventions after VU4 DXpedition along with NIAR officials, Mr. B. M. Baveja, Director, DIT and DIT officials & NIAR together brought all the ministries together and got the permission so that Indian & DX Amateur Radio operators could operate the Ham Radio in the Emerald Islands.

Many Hams took part as groups, participating in a total of 11 groups from various countries as well as operating from various locations of Emerald Islands and made possible more than 86,800 contacts. If our team didn't have the power black out and various interruptions then certainly we could have made many more ...

Once again Indian Amateur Radio created history in allowing the foreign nationals dream operation of Emerald Islands as well as global friendship through Ham Radio.

— 73 — Sarath, VU3RSB, <http://www.vu3rsb.org>, is one of the leading national Amateur Radio operators. He has been an amateur for the last 15 years and also the recipient of the prestigious Rajiv Gandhi Award for Amateur Radio in the year 1996 & 1997 directly from Smt. Sonia Gandhi. He was a member of the VU4 Dxpediton in 2004 & Tsunami Emergency Communication as well Member in VU4 Dxpediton in 2006. He received the 2005 International Humanitarian Award from the ARRL.

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