

ZK1 Cook Islands - 30th January - 3rd March 2005

By Tim Beaumont M3SDE / ZK1SDE

<http://www.zk1sde.co.uk>

This was my third trip to the South Cook Islands with the hope of activating ZK1 North also. On this trip I was joined by Jed ZK1SDZ, Magnus ZK1WET (SM6WET) and Tomas ZK1XMY (SM6XMY). As with any DX-pedition it has taken a great deal of planning over the last 12 months to make this dream reality. We needed a variety of mono band Yagi's for this expedition, and as I did not have the money to buy production antennas I asked M1DCV Marti to help out as Antenna Designer and construct the Yagi's for our specification. To ship all the masts, cables antennas and brackets was quite a mission. Eventually we received a major sponsorship from Royal Mail Parcelforce Worldwide who agreed to ship the 157 Kg's of equipment as air freight all the way to the Cook Islands, this was worth £1,000 to the team and was a major boost to the progress of the plans.



Being a superstitious person, I was very concerned that I had so much luck with the organising of this trip, everything had just fallen into place and everyone had done their bit to make it a success, but had I had my luck just too soon? I was soon to find out. For the daily diary of our expedition you can go to my webpage <http://www.zk1sde.co.uk>

I will try now to tell you the story of our experience in paradise!! Hhmm!! The long flight went quite well, but those guys at US customs at Los Angeles really gave me a lot of stress. All 13 cases had to be opened and sniffer dogs used to check for explosives, despite the papers I had showed them, giving an exact list of all our radio equipment and serial numbers. Every case emptied, every case repacked without care and without letting us repack them... then each case was tossed upside down and thrown with force onto a conveyer belt. They knew how fragile the equipment was and they did not give a damn, when I said "That just was not necessary" they just looked at me as though I was a terrorist. I was so stressed at this point I could not think straight, but what can you do? Back on the plane the journey continued uneventfully.

Our arrival in the Cook Islands was sunny and hot with a temperature of 34°C. After one and a half days travelling, a short inter Island flight took us to our first destination Aitutaki Island, where we were met by Queen Tutai Manarangi, the traditional leader of the Island. We were staying at her lodges for the duration of our stay. Day 2 & 3 was taken up either sleeping off jet lag or trying to put up antennas and masts in the burning heat of the day, not easy when you have flown 10,000 miles. We were now ready to start our ZK1 IOTA of OC-083 we knew it was going to be hard working Europe, and especially hard to work UK probably the most difficult path on the globe at this time of the cycle. We hired locals to climb the 25 metre coconut trees to erect the wire verticals and delta loop for 30m, 40m, and 80m these guys are experts and are happy to receive \$50 for the dangerous work. The average wage here is \$2 an hour. I was badly bitten by mosquitoes by this time and my left foot was becoming very swollen with an infection. Also Magnus had a swollen foot so we decided it best to go to the hospital and get some medical assistance.

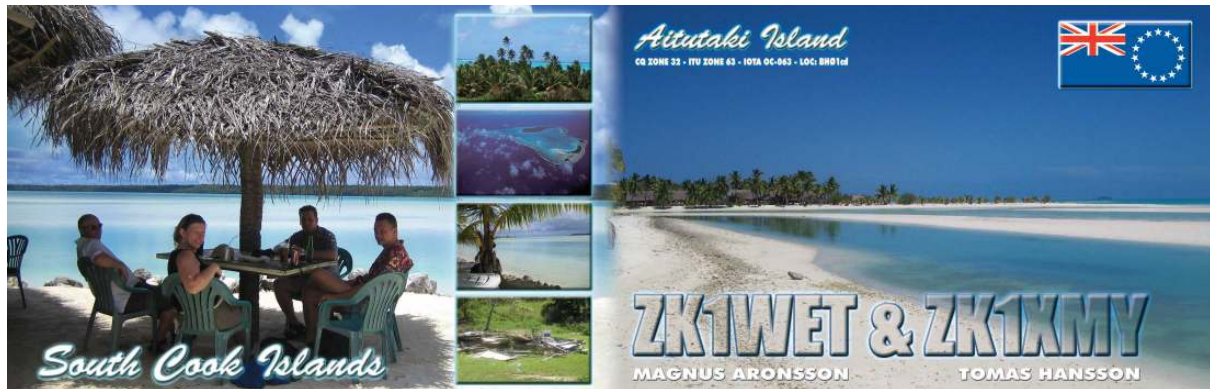


On Day 6 We received some news that was really quite frightening, Cyclone Meena was heading our way and we would have to keep a track of its path we discussed things with the owner of the lodge and he was satisfied that the construction of the lodges was strong and would withstand such a storm. The bands we holding up well with our first contacts to Europe and my first DX on 80m was hard work but was working well.

Day 7 was a day for stocking up with food, water and supplies required if we were to be hit by this hurricane. The Yagi beams had to be taken down for safety and I was busy tracking the storm thanks to the Pacific Cyclone Watch, A35RK Paul in Tonga kept me updated as to its path as did many other concerned hams in the Pacific. That night was a long frightening night.

Shortly after 11pm the wind became hurricane force with damaging winds of 150 Mph with gusts of 180Mph. 3am and Meena had reached her peak 16 miles to our west. All around we could here the crack of trees breaking, crashing through other trees and huge thuds as they fall to the floor. The lodges were tested to the extreme, each gust lifted the lodge shook it and I flew to the bathroom the safest place to take cover. The power failed at this time and we were left in darkness. By first light the winds had

dropped safely enough to go outside, the devastation was all around, my first concern was the safety not only of our team but everyone in the 4 lodges thank god everyone was fine with no damage to any of the lodges. It took a couple of hours using chainsaws to get our way to the road, thanks to Des and Tutai and their staff. I drove the doctors up to the hospital in the 4x4 I had hired to see if there was anything we could do there but we were pleased to see that no injuries had been reported on the island everyone was safe.



Day 9 Now it was safe to put up the antennas again and restart our IOTA of Aitutaki Island there were good openings for us on 40 and 80m but 20m was still hard going. The K index was high causing several days of radio black outs on our latitude. The climbing guys had to be hired again as all the verticals and delta loop were all in pieces after the storm. By day 14 Magnus was active in the RTTY contest over the weekend, many DX'ers questioned his prefix not sure if they heard correct ZK1 on RTTY??? This created much interest and Magnus ZK1WET was soon into pile up mode. Oh boy..... more bad news. Cyclone Nancy was now heading our way, our spirits dropped again as we realised what was ahead. Thankfully Nancy passed by 100 miles off the coast and although the wind was still hurricane force not too much damage was done.... Another day of putting up antennas was becoming very hard work. The humidity after the heavy rain brought its own problems, the rain just evaporated in the 34°C heat and became humidity like I had never experienced, the lap top computers had to be kept on 24/7 to prevent the water popping the circuits, already Des's computer in the lodge had shut down, our log books and diary would have to be sent using the internet café in the village nearby. Internet here is what it was in the UK about 10 years ago, slow and very expensive; I spent £100 here just sending emails home to our web manager. Most of the telephone lines were not working to the outside world only inter island phones were working so e-mail was the lifeline to let our families know that we were safe after the hurricanes.

Valentines Day brought some romance to the team, Magnus ZK1WET and his girlfriend Anki disappeared for some time together and came back to the team engaged and had exchanged rings and it was time to celebrate. The good news was to be short lived as we browsed over weather charts

for the Pacific, just 2 days before we were due to fly up to the North Cook Island we had a team meeting and decided that it was just too dangerous to go to Manihiki Atoll, the depression causing the Cyclones was huge and was threatening to emit more dangerous weather in the area. The depression of cold air from Antarctica had moved up to 10° south of the equator where the sea temperature was 30°C the perfect recipe for cyclone formation. Our spirits dropped again as I was forced to send a press release to the DX bulletins.



Sure enough we were hit again by the third storm Cyclone Olaf which hit us again hard and again antennas were taken down to prevent them being damaged or blown around like missiles. Our decision to cancel ZK1 North was the right decision; Air Rarotonga had grounded all their planes and were sheltering from the storm away from the Cyclone area. Just how unlucky could we be 3 hurricanes had hit us in 14 days previously only 2 hurricanes had hit the island in the last 40 years! Despite all these set backs the bands were opening up well from time to time with short pile ups lasting one or two hours at sunrise and sunset, at these times the path to the USA, Japan and Europe was at its best and we were kept busy on 20, 40 and 80m.

Day 19 - The 20m Yagi suffered some damage in the winds before the cyclone hit so repair work was done and the antenna put back up. The rest of the team were due to fly back to Europe today and I bid them farewell as they headed for Rarotonga, they were to be stuck there for 2 days as their flights home were cancelled as Cyclone Olaf raged over Raro. I had one night of excellent conditions to Europe at this time from 11pm local time to 5am the pile ups carried on hour after hour, in total 800 contacts were added to my log in 16 hours, time for a well deserved beer to celebrate. The following 10 days gave mixed conditions and the path to Europe was tough. G3SED Mike must be thanked for keeping my spirits up as he reported daily that he was hearing my signal and posting info on the cluster in attempt to start a pile up, but many times it seemed that he was the only person in Europe hearing me. During the day when the band was pretty much closed gave me time to spend on the beach or in the bar socialising with the doctors hihi.

The cyclones also meant that the supply ships had not visited the island for a month and there was no petrol on the island, diesel was low threatening the electricity supply and food was also in short supply... Isn't it strange that beer is the only thing that doesn't run dry?

Day 29 - More bad news this time from ZK3HC Uwe a German operator Island hopping was in direct path of Cyclone Percy which devastated the Tokelau Islands that night, by the tone of his voice I could sense his fear and his emotion told me exactly what he had witnessed as it exploded into a category 5 hurricane. It was heading my way and there was no chance of evacuation as all aircraft again were grounded for safety. Tokelau had been hit by 161 Mph wind and gusts up to 196 Mph. Thankfully Percy passed by 300 miles west causing us only gale force wind and heavy overnight rain and no damage. Thanks to the operators in the UK that were very patient with me on 80m my small signal was being heard by you guys and we made it in the end. Swains Island which was due to be active in the coming days was also hit directly by the eye of the storm and I wondered how safe the Swains Island Team would be on the Island.

My time on Aitutaki Island was now at an end, I bid farewell to all the friends that I had made on the island and promised to return one day for another adventure. Getting off the Island was another ordeal, 2 flights cancelled and the third successful attempt gave me a scary landing at Rarotonga were Percy was still blowing a 50 Mph gale one wheel down and oh just how long did it take to get the other wheels on the runway... Phew that was close! Waiting for me was our friend Victor ZK1CG, to give me the news that Air New Zealand had just cancelled my flight back to Europe. I can't thank Victor enough for what he did for me in the coming days, after another cancelled flight 2 days later caused by another storm Cyclone Rea, Victor put me up for 5 days until I was able to fly out to New Zealand to fly back to Los Angeles and finally London 5 days later than scheduled.

I had a thoroughly good time in ZK1 and the experience here has once again enriched me with memories which I will never forget. I do not know of any ham expedition in history to be hit by 5 hurricanes. I was so sad to cancel the ZK1 North trip but safety of the team comes first. I also need to thank MW0JZE Anthony who worked daily to update my website and keep my family informed of my well being. The people of the Cook Islands are wonderful people with so much friendship to give, I thank them very much. Thanks to my travelling companions for their company. Yes, just maybe I did have all my luck before I left home.... I will be back. Very soon.

Statistics ZK1 2005

- ZK1SDE 5,944 QSO's into 125 DXCC entities.
- A further 2,000 QSO's also were logged by the ZK1 Team.
Most unusual propagation experienced: working GM3POI Clive at 13:15 UTC on 40m over 5 hours after his sunrise!
- Most Interesting place worked: Scott Base South Pole - Antarctica ZL5/ZL2PD5
- Rarest DXCC worked: Jarvis / Palmyra Island - KH5/AH6NF
- QSL Sponsored by ON5UR QSL Printing

Kind Regards, Tim Beaumont
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