

VU7MY MINICOY DX PEDITION

-Jose Jacob VU2JOS



Minicoy also called as Maliku by the local people is different from other islands of the Lakshadeep and is located in the South West coast of India in the Arabian Sea. This island is only of 4.80 sqkm area and is 10.6 kms long and is 398 kms away from Kochi. It has a large lagoon. Their nearest island is Maldives which is only 80 kms away which has the same language viz Mahl and culture. Malayalam is also widely spoken here which also happens to be my mother tongue. The population of the island is about 10,000 and all the local people there are Muslims. They are well known mariners and lot of people from this island work on ships. Women are more empowered there. Foreigners are not permitted to visit these islands. Even Indians must get special entry permits to visit there. The Lakshadeep Tourist Department called SPORTS brings Indian tourists regularly here.

For Amateur Radio purposes, Islands on the Air (IOTA) has issued a separate number to Minicoy viz AS-106 while all the other islands of Lakshadeep has the number as AS-011. It is a very much sought after island as the only activity from there was 46 years back. Thanks to National Institute of Amateur Radio (NIAR) which hosted the Hamfest 2007 in Lakshadeep, this rare island was activated again for the occasion much to the delight of Dxers world wide. We had the special callsign VU7MY to be used in Minicoy. VU2MY by the way is the callsign of OM Suri, Chairman of NIAR. The VU7RG callsign in memory of Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India

was used in Kadamat Island where the Hamfest was held and in Agatti and Bangaram Islands also simultaneously.

The Lakshadeep Hamfest 2007 attracted 33 famous DX hams from 11 countries and several Indian hams, the total no. of contacts made were 1, 10,067. QSL cards for these operations are handled by efficient QSL Managers in Germany, USA and Japan. It has been proved again that what ever NIAR does, it does it in style. Thanks to the great Indian visionary ham OM Suri, VU2MY founder of NIAR for conducting such an interesting Hamfest along with Dxpedition and for sending me to operate from the rare Minicoy Island.



Mr.S.Suri, VU2MY speaking at Hamfest 2007, Kadamat

Special thanks to Department of Information Technology, Ministry of Tourism, Lakshadeep Administration, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Telecommunications, Govt. of India, International Advisory Committee of Hamfest, the International Dx Community and Foundations and to the people of Lakshadeep for their support to Hamfest 2007.

Our Minicoy team leader was the internationally renowned YL Bharathi, VU2RBI, chief co-ordinator of NIAR in Delhi who had done all the ground work for us like licensing, accommodation and other logistics. Our other team members were her 13 year old daughter YL Mahathi, VU3DSM, one of the youngest hams of India; YL Bhanu VU2BL, a retired Manager from Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd who had taken part in 3 other Dxpeditons; OM Madhu VU2UWZ, a technical hand and good photographer and myself. It was my 5th Dxpediton and the 2nd one to Lakshadeep. I was a member of the VU7APR VU7NRO Dxpediton to Kavaratti in 1989. My other 3 dxpeditons were to Andaman & Nicobar Islands in 1987, 2004, 2006. All these were organised by NIAR.

At NIAR we have burnt the midnight oil regularly as the deadline for the Hamfest arrived. OM Suri, VU2MY, Chairman, NIAR and The International Advisory Committee formed for the Hamfest guided us for the mega event. The equipments were identified, packed and sent by road cargo to Kochi before our arrival. 600 kgs of equipment was there to Minicoy alone.

Thanks to OM Rob, PA2R for maintaining a nice website www.vu7.in which attracted thousands of visitors.

To go to Lakshadeep, the main route is through my native place Kochi. In November 2006, OM Ram Mohan, VU2MYH and I had visited Kadamat Island for a fact finding tour and we had collected lot of latest and valuable information for the smooth running of the Hamfest and Dxpediton. Being local persons, I and OM Madhu and my XYL Lissy were sent by NIAR to Kochi early to make the necessary arrangements and for logistic support and to receive the foreign and Indian delegates.



DK5WL, VU3LMS, VU2JOS, VU2UWZ, DL9GFB, DL7DF, SP3CYY, SP3DOI in Kochi Airport

The Kochi airport is about 35 kms away from the city. It was interesting to receive especially the foreign delegates from North America, Europe and Japan and to drop them at the Hotel Avenue Regent in the city center. Most of them came with heavy luggage. Several of them were familiar faces as they had attended the similar VU4AN Hamfest operations held in Andaman & Nicobar Islands. At that time I had received them in Chennai Airport. OM Sridhar VU3IGG also received some delegates in Kochi. I also co-ordinated with the Lakshadeep office in Kochi for the booking of ship tickets and entry permits which were issued only in the last minute due to odd reasons causing heart burns to many foreign delegates. OM Madhu and I found time to visit the Lakshadeep communication center located nearby which had HF and VHF links.

At the hotel in Kochi, OM Suri, Chairman, NIAR had formal get together with the delegates. Reciprocal licences were issued to the foreign hams.



Some members of VU7RG & VU7MY teams at Hotel in Kochi before departure to Lakshadeep.

The Kochi harbor is located in Wellington Island about 8 kms from the hotel where the delegates stayed. We transported the delegates by bus and sent the huge luggage in a small truck.

The first batch consisting of OM Frank DL4KQ, OM Joe, AA4NN, OM Dough N6TQS, OM Adolf WA9QJH, OM Ram VU2LIC and OM Leela VU3LGX left from Kochi to Kadamat by M.V. Amindivi on 8th January 2007. The second batch consisting of foreign delegates left for Kadamat/Agatti/Bangaram on 12th January 2007 by M.V. Bharat Seema. The last batch including our Minicoy team and Kadamat delegates left on the afternoon 13th January 2007 by M.V. Tipu Sultan. Once I boarded the ship through a long ladder as one of the last delegates, I had a sigh of relief. It is a big but old ship which has a capacity for 800 passengers on board. On the ship we had a mini hamfest. We visited the captain's room. I saw their radios and observed that their callsign was VTQG.



M.V. Tipu Sultan, one of the life lines of Lakshadweep to the mainland

This ship reached Kadamat Island next day afternoon. Except for the 5 member Minicoy team all others delegates disembarked. The same ship continued its voyage to Minicoy where we reached next day morning. There are no jetties where ship can anchor in these islands and so the ships stops in mid sea and the passengers board into small boats to reach the islands. It is an adventurous trip with sea water some times splashing into the boats. At Minicoy, we were the last passengers to get down to a special tourist boat. The ride in the small

boat took 35 minutes and we landed at exactly 11.20 am.



Transfer between ship to islands – an interesting experience



Arrival in Minicoy Port



Mr.F.G.Mohammed, an Officer in the local tourism department had arranged all our accommodation in the island. We checked into Twinkle Home, a hotel at Bada Village which is about half km away from the jetty. We had reached there only in the morning of 15th January 2006 and by then our operation permits were valid and the stations from other 3 islands were already on

band from midnight. Twinkle Home was a brand new two story hotel inaugurated just a few days before our arrival and we were the second batch of guests to check in there. There are hardly any other private hotels there. We occupied the top floor of the hotel and put up a station immediately in a separate room.



VU2UWZ, VU2RBI, VU3DSM, VU2BL, VU2JOS at Minicoy Jetty on arrival

OM Madhu was our Antenna Man and installed a 14/21 MHz Dipole antenna on the roof top for a start and our station with a brand new Icom IC 7000 was on air with lot of pileups. As stations were operating from 4 islands of Lakshadweep, separate frequencies were allotted to each island to avoid confusion and we followed it strictly. An HF vertical and a Spider beam were added to this shack in the coming days. The Twinkle Home was like our home where we had food and where we relaxed. We soon found that this shack away from the sea was

noisy compared to the other two shacks on the island from where we operated.



The Hustler 4-BTV Vertical antenna gifted by Dr. Glenn, W0GJ installed at the beach in Panchayat Office shack, Minicoy which worked extremely well.



YL Bharathi, VU2RBI team leader VU7MY

We got our Man Friday in the form of SWL Mubarak a young islander who was an all rounder. Besides helping us with local logistics, he would climb on coconut trees to install antennas, pick and drop us in various shacks on motor bike and even serve us food in Twinkle Home. Food was specially cooked for us.



View of Viringilli Island on Southern side of Minicoy



SWL Mubarak near proposed new Light House

OM Madhu and I, the non vegetarians enjoyed eating local fish delicacies daily while the 3 other YLs were strict vegetarians.

Once the first station was on, we went scouting for other suitable sites. We could get a nice vacant room adjoining the Village Panchayat office in the Western side of the island, which was next to the sea.



VU2JOS, VU3DSM, Chairperson, VU2RBI, VU2BL, in front of Village Panchayat Office, Minicoy.

It was about half a km from Twinkle Home. The second shack was operational with another brand new Icom IC 7000 from the first day itself. It was our best shack and here we first installed a 40 M Inverted Vee and an Icom AH 710 folded dipole antenna on coconut trees. A Telex Hy Gain 14 AVQ/WB Vertical and a 7 Element Triband Yagi were added to this shack in the coming days. The yagi for some odd reason failed to work properly on some bands.



Installation of 7 element yagi at Panchayat Shack, Minicoy

The vertical antenna placed in the beach at ground level with radials spread worked wonderfully well from this shack. The first vertical antenna got “blasted” here and we replaced it with the Hustler 4-BTV Trap Vertical (with 30 M add on kit) donated by Dr.Glenn, W0GJ which also worked wonderfully well. It was here that YL Bharathi had a fall while adjusting the radials and had to get medical treatment. Even though she was injured she continued with enthusiasm and ended up making the maximum number of QSOs from there.

The third shack was started on the second day in an unused Customs Office room at Falessery on the Eastern side of the island, next to the sea, about one and half km away from Twinkle Home. Here we put a Telex Hy Gain 14 AVQ/WB Vertical, Icom AH 710 HF Folded dipole, 7 MHz Inverted Vee and a 10/14 MHz Inverted V. The radios used here were Yaesu FT 757 GX II and Icom IC 706 MKII. The sea was very rough on this eastern side of the island. As this shack was in a lonely place without any basic amenities, we operated from here only in day time and up to around 9.00 pm. All shacks used Yaesu FL 7000 linears.

We used to take turns to operate but not strictly on timetable basis. My first QSOs were with my sister YL Nisha VU2NIS and my XYL Lissy VU3LMS operating from Kadamat Island with the callsign VU7RG. OM Madhu and I were busy putting up shacks and antennas in day time while the YLs operated merrily. We the

2 OMs used to operate more at night normally and even sleep in makeshift beds in the Panchayat Office shack till the YLs came for day duty. Later we used to go to the other shacks. I was privileged to be the only CW operator of the group. While the 4 others were shouting at their best into the microphones, I was coolly making QSOs. Sometimes when SSB stations were hard to be got, I could get many stations in CW. The huge pileup is to be experienced to be believed and almost always I operated in split mode, listening a few kHz up. Sometimes we used to loose cool when some stations were not following our instructions. I used a Hymount keyer made in Japan. Severe interference was noted from several Indonesian SSB stations on the CW band of 40 meters. Though most of logs were entered in our laptops using logging soft wares, paper logs were also used at times. The AC power supply was fine and failed only a few times. Big diesel generators are being used to supply power on the island. Solar panels are also used in several places. Our group made a total of 17075 QSOs out of which I could make a modest 4129 QSOs from 104 DXCC countries mostly in CW. I found that I made only 1.16 % of my contacts in voice. We got more stations on 40 meters which was wide open to DX all throughout the night. More contacts were made with Japanese, German and Russian stations. I especially liked the early morning hours when we used to get North and South American stations. Sometimes conditions were so good that I used to get American stations on 40 Meters even at 8.45 am local time. Special thanks to the other members of the team for their support.

Though all groups started operations on 15th January 2007, VU7RG stations operated by DX Hams had to close down on 24th January 2007 but we at VU7MY were privileged to operate till 30th January 2007. We were busy setting up our stations in Minicoy while the Hamfest meetings were successfully going on in Kadamat. VU2BL of our team had to return to the mainland early on 19th January 2007 due to marriage

of her sister's daughter. She was scheduled to leave later but that ship was cancelled.

Cycles and two wheelers are used in large numbers on the island. We also got 2 bicycles, one on rent and another freely thanks to the generosity of the local Police sub Inspector. We used it frequently to go from shack to shack. The people were very friendly. The local ladies use a special type of dress like gown with a veil partially covering their head.



Local ladies near the park in Minicoy



A mosque in Minicoy

There are no beggars in the island. Besides coconut trees we could find Bread fruit trees, drumstick trees etc. in plenty. There are cats, goats, cows etc. there but no dogs. Liquor is strictly prohibited and there are no movie theatres also. The local people including YLs were chewing pans a lot. The weather was warm while we there and it rained lightly at night on a couple of occasions. There are two dozen mosques and we hear the call for prayer echoing five times each day on loud speakers.

Telephone is widely used and even cell phones. The internet is available in a few places. Local News papers come from Kochi when the ship arrives once or twice each week. The ships arrive in the morning and leave in the evening. During rainy season only large ships comes here. There are several shops and they are open at 10.30 am to 12.00 noon and 4.00 pm to 11.00 pm. Most of the items come from Kochi except coconut and tuna fish which is exported. We visited the Tuna Fish Canning Factory and saw how raw tuna is being processed and packed. It's the only such factory in the whole of Lakshadweep. We purchased some Tuna Fish pickles and a few small coconut trees for our homes.



Women at work in the Tuna Canning Factory, Minicoy

There is a Helepad here which is used by Helicopters for VVIPs and as Ambulance. There is Govt. Hospital on the island which also uses the telemedicine facility. There are other private clinics also. For major ailments, they go to the mainland. There is a Naval Detachment and a Meteorological station on the island. We drank purified rain water in the hotel which tasted fine. Rain water harvesting is done on the islands seriously and they store it for long time. Tap connections are also there. Sea water is also converted into drinking water here.

The roads are narrow, made of concrete and had strange names. The main road we frequented was called Lynu Magu. Magu means Road in local Mahl language. The houses also had strange names. The

vertical antenna of the 3rd station was put on top of a 2 story house under construction named Adigandua Ouge. Ouge means house in their language. There are 3 cars, 2 buses, one jeep, an ambulance, a fire engine, lot of scooters, bikes, bicycles and several other light vehicles in use on the island. In Minicoy there is a cresh, 2 nursery schools, 3 Government schools and one Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (Residential school). At school timings we could lot of students riding on bicycles in groups. We gave demonstration of Amateur Radio to students of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya on 22nd January 2007 and to other Government Officials on several occasions.



Amateur Radio demonstration for students in Minicoy by VU2RBI & VU2JOS



Local transport in Minicoy

A couple of times we found time for snorkeling. It was fun to be in sea water and watching the corals and colorful fishes under the sea. OM Madhu and I walked to the small island called Viringilli one day during

low tide, which is very close to the island in the Southern side. Another day we had an adventurous walk to the uninhabited Northern tip of the island through the beach. The middle portion of the island is only inhabited and the other areas are full of coconut trees only.

We visited the famous Minicoy Light House one day. It has the code no. 0758 which was first commissioned on 2nd February 1885. There is a Differential Global Positioning System (DGPS) commissioned on 23 May 2000 which operates on 306 kHz Long Wave with 500 watts. There is also an Radar transponder, Racon of 500 milli watt on top of the Light House which send outs the letter G as identification in Morse Code near 5300-5500 MHz which was commissioned on 25th March 1985. It is an interesting sight from the top of the Light House. A new light house is being built in the Northern Side of the island.



VU2JOS in front of Minicoy Light House



VU2JOS OM Jose with VU3DSM YL Mahathi, one of the youngest hams of India



VU2JOS near Radio Tower of DGPS station, Minicoy Light House

We also visited the local Doordarshan TV station there. It's of 10 watt and operates on Channel 11+ on solar power. Not many people view this station but are glued to the cable TV channels in Malayalam. There is also a Satellite Earth Station and a Digital Transmission Station of BSNL near our Panchayath Office shack.

Republic day was celebrated there on 26th January, 2007 with lot of gaiety. Besides the Flag hoisting ceremony in the morning, there were football matches and cultural programs in the evening and night. Special food stalls selling Biryani and other delicacies and toys etc. came up near the venue and most of the Minicoy people gathered there. The next day the schools had the annual days at the same venue with similar programs. These programs were telecast live on the local Star Vision cable TV network.



The main cable TV dish antenna in Minicoy



Luggage in Minicoy Port during departure

As we neared 31st January, 2007 our departure date, we slowly shut down stations and packed them neatly. Our last station closed down on 30th January, 2007 at 9.00 pm. We returned by MV Amindivi which was a small ship and the reached Kochi on 1st Feb. 2007. As the weather was a little rough most of us were sea sick. We found that the Chief Engineer of this ship OM Raphael was a ham with the callsign VU2CJY. We visited the ship's radio shack which had the callsign VVNT.



VU2JOS in M.V. Amindivi Radio shack



The M.V. Amindivi ship on which we had the return voyage

After a few days stay in Kochi and sending back all the equipments to NIAR by road, we returned to Hyderabad on 4th Feb 2007. OM Madhu took hundreds of nice photos. We shall cherish for ever our memories of participating in an interesting Dxpediton.

We sincerely thank all the supporting and sponsoring agencies particularly the DX Foundations and Individual hams for assisting us to organize this historic event. We look forward to contact you on other challenging ham adventures.

VU7MY MINICOY STATION DETAILS:

1: Twinkle Home, Bada Village



Icom IC 7000
Yaesu FL 7000
Hustler 4-BTV Trap Vertical, Spider Beam,
14/21 MHz Inverted V
Hymound Keyer
20 A Power Supply

2. Panchayat Office



Icom IC 7000
Yaesu FL 7000
Telex Hy Gain 14 AVQ/WB Vertical
Hustler 4-BTV Vertical (with 30M add on kit),
Icom AH 710 HF Folded dipole, 7 MHz Inv.V
7 Element Triband Yagi
Hymound Keyer
20 A Power Supply

3. Customs Office, Falessery Village



OM Madhu, VU2UWZ in Customs Office shack

Icom IC 706 MK IIG, Yaesu FT 757 GX II
Icom PS 55 (2 Nos.)
Yaesu FL 7000
Telex Hy Gain 14 AVQ/WB Vertical, Icom AH
710 HF Folded dipole, 7 MHz Inv.V
10/14 MHz Inverted V
Other items:
Laptops – 3 Nos.
MFJ Antenna Analyzer
Head phones
RG 213, RG 8 U, RG 58 U Coax cable

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