

# THE 100 POUND DXPEDITION

Winter 2006



Right: The guest house at the Windchime Villa on the island of St. John, US Virgin Islands. Scott (NE1RD) inset.

## Amateur radio in the Caribbean Minimal equipment, maximum fun!

By B. Scott Andersen ~ NE1RD

Traveling to far-away and exotic places can be both exciting and restful. Some go to bask in the sun doing nothing more than plowing through a few paperbacks and perfecting their tans. Others need to be active, doing, seeing, and following their passion whether it be sailing, scuba diving, wind surfing, or skiing. My passion of late has been amateur radio, talking to people hundreds or thousands of miles away with nothing more than a wire, a small radio, and some imagination.

In March of 2006, in the final throws of Winter in New England, we traveled to the US

Virgin Islands and Windchime, a villa high atop Giffit Hill on the island of St. John with its magnificent view of the Caribbean. The selection of this secluded property was partially motivated by our desire to “get away from it all”, but mostly because it looked to be a perfect place where Sandy, the love of my life for over a quarter century now, could enjoy herself and I could operate my radio in the Amateur Radio Relay League’s (ARRL) annual DX contest.

Radio contesting might sound like a strange concept but the idea is simple: within the rules

of this contest, talk to as many people as you can, in as many places as you can. Think of it as a scavenger hunt across six continents. In this contest, stations in the Continental United States and Canada try to work as many stations outside that area as they can. Normally I’d be participating in the contest from my home in Massachusetts, trying to work stations in Europe, Africa, South America, and beyond. This time I would be one of those remote stations sought by hams back in the States and Canada.

DX is a term hams use for distance communication. There-

fore, packing up and going to some exotic location to operate your ham radio isn't just an expedition, it is a *d Expedition*. Many large, well-organized *d Expeditions* have been launched in recent times to the most remote places on Earth, costing their organizers as much as a half-million dollars. My *d Expeditions* are much more modest.

In the months leading up to the trip I had carefully considered what should be brought to the island for my station. I had to plan carefully for once there the nearest place where I might be able to obtain parts or equipment was on St. Thomas, an hour's ferry ride away. There were limits to what I could take as well. Airlines have significantly reduced the allowance for the size and weight of a checked bag. Travelers must now limit themselves to only two checked bags, each weighing no more than 50 pounds. These numbers seemed daunting at first but soon I was inspired. This wouldn't just be my *d Expedition*; this would be my 100 pound *d Expedition*! Rather than sulk over the limits imposed, I would rejoice. As an artist might say, "form is freeing." These new limits brought focus to the task. I would not just live within these restrictions, I would thrive!

Choosing just the right equipment and luggage to carry it was an exercise in balancing frugality of weight with the expediency of having conveniences and backups. There were several nights where equipment was carefully weighed on a postal scale and ounces and pounds were tallied. Airline rules were also scrutinized looking for loopholes in case I needed "that little extra wiggle room." Indeed I found exceptions. Bags associated with sporting activities such as skiing, golfing, bowling, etc., were all given exceptions from the standard 50 pound or 62 linear inches of size rules. A hard-sided golf bag, for example, could be up to

70 pounds without incurring extra charges.

In the hours before the limo picked us up, I finalized what would be brought, and not a moment too soon! One Pelican 1610 case, waterproof and rock-solid, held the main radio, antenna analyzer, power supply, antenna tuner, and a myriad of

truck we had arrived at our little corner of paradise. The property had everything we'd need for a week's peace and quiet. The main house had two bedrooms, bath, laundry, great room, and kitchen where we would cook all our meals during our stay. The guest house consisted of just one large bedroom and attached bath. On



Scott with his 100 pounds

small parts. A second case, a hard-sided golf bag, contained fiberglass masts, long runs of coaxial cable, wire, and tools. The golf bag also contained a commercially made antenna system called a Buddipole that could be configured for use on most of the bands I would be using. If all else failed, my trusty Buddipole would save the day.

We sped into Boston's Logan Airport Hilton to spend the night before our early morning flight. Morning came and after two flights, two cabs, a ferry, and a lift from our Windchime host in the back of his late model pickup

its roof was a hot tub and plenty of room for antennas!

Antenna work began immediately. Sandy helped me construct the four antennas that would be used for the week and especially the contest that weekend. (A list of antennas and other equipment appears at the end.)

A quick reorganizing of furniture brought the writing desk originally situated in the great room of the main house to the guest house. That was my operating position. After finishing wiring the antennas and running the coax into the newly organized radio "shack", it was time to see if

all this planning, scheming, and conniving with airline baggage rules actually gave me a station that worked. Would anyone hear me? Within minutes all fears evaporated as I called out and talked with hams in New York,

takes is an amateur radio license and a sense of imagination. And, in the tradition of the best dxpeditions, Sandy and I began the all-important discussion on the airplane ride back: “where next?!” Wherever it might be, expect to



Scott configuring the Buddipole for 20 meters

the island of Nevis, the Czech Republic, Columbia, Poland, Curacao, England, Belgium, and Canada. I should have no trouble at all in the contest!

The ARRL DX contest began promptly at 8 PM local time Friday night. At the contest’s start, I was nowhere to be found on those bands. Instead, Sandy and I were finishing one of the many meals we prepared together. There would be time for contesting, but this was family time, vacation time, and a time to enjoy our good fortunes together in that wonderful place.

I did spend most of that weekend’s waking hours working in the contest eventually putting over 500 contacts in my log and talking to people as far away as Washington State and British Columbia. My very modestly equipped dxpedition allowed me to achieve my goals for the trip and to have a wonderful time.

The 100 pound dxpedition is something anybody can do. All it

see us with our 100 pounds (or less!) and a smile.

**B. Scott Andersen (NE1RD) was first licensed in 2002 and holds an Extra class ticket. His previous dxpedition was to the big island of Hawaii. His next stop is Deer Isle, Maine to operate a special event station K1P in celebration of Patriots Day.**



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## EQUIPMENT

### Main radio

- Yaesu FT-897D 100-watt transceiver

### Antennas

- 15 meters: Buddistick mount with 12-foot MFJ collapsable whip
- 20 meters: “big” Buddipole system with 16-foot mast and heavy-duty shock cord whips
- 40/15 meters: 20-foot fishing pole mounted on the roof with a 33-foot vertical wire and radial
- 80 meters: 33-foot DK9SQ mast mounted on the roof with a 66-foot vertical and radial

### Additional stuff

- Heil Pro-Set Plus headset
- MFJ 259B analyzer
- Anderson PowerPole power distribution system
- 275 feet of RG-8X coax
- Pelican 1610 case
- “The Vault” golf case

### Backup radio

- Yasesu FT-817 5-watt QRP transceiver

### Backup antennas

- “standard” Buddipole system
- G5RV
- Arrow 2/70cm satellite antenna system

### Resources

<http://www.buddipole.com>  
<http://www.qslworks.com>  
<http://www.dxercase.com>  
<http://www.suitestjohn.com>  
<http://www.bright.net/~kanga/kanga/>