

Chasing Desecheo and Bouvet from the Mountains

Higher altitude — and moral support from a fellow ham — helped IX1CKN log two DXCC entities ranked among the world's top 15 most wanted.

Christian Diemoz, IX1CKN

Even for hams who do not follow the DXCC rankings day by day, the beginning of 2026 will remain memorable. The year opened with two major DXpeditions to entities sitting firmly among the world's top 15 most sought after: Desecheo Island, KP5/NP3VI, west of Puerto Rico, and Bouvet Island, 3YØK, a Norwegian overseas territory located between Africa and Antarctica. A true one-two punch of excitement for the DX community.

For different reasons, both are places bordering on inaccessible, with no permanent inhabitants except for wildlife. Whenever they have appeared on the air, it was only thanks to DXpeditions reaching them, and the operations scheduled for early 2026 provided a rare opportunity. Hams at home knew that missing those contacts would mean waiting years for another shot.

That reality raised the stakes considerably, especially for a station like mine that is anything but a “big gun.” I had the added complication of operating from Italy's Aosta Valley. As you may remember from my previous article, “Going Portable in a Challenging Location,” in the February 2025 issue, about activity from IX1, it is tucked away in the country's northwest corner, with a narrow valley floor and mountains all around, four of them exceeding 4,000 meters.

Still, one thing I have learned up here is that altitude and the right portable operating location can dramatically improve your chances, even with a less-expensive setup like mine. So when operations from KP5 began in January, I immediately started planning an attempt at putting Desecheo in my log.

Desecheo Island, KP5/NP3VI

Geographically, Desecheo's Caribbean location was not an impossible path from Aosta Valley. What complicated matters was the unique nature of the DXpedition itself. No operators were physically on the island — public access is forbidden because Desecheo is a former military firing range that was never fully cleared. Instead, the team installed low-power transmitters powered by solar panels to maximize operating time,

along with vertical antennas placed in the beach area, while they controlled the station remotely.

In practical terms, very few people heard Desecheo strongly, and I feared I might not hear it at all. From home, with my path toward Central America heavily blocked, there was no point even trying. But Ozein, near Aymavilles — a location I've previously used for putting out my signal toward the Americas — was a good option. I drove there on February 28, with the DXpedition already nearing its end.

The setup was my usual one: my car parked roadside, an FT-897 inside the vehicle, and a quarter-wave vertical antenna mounted nearby on the ground. Because of battery-charging constraints, the daily operating schedule of KP5/NP3VI was fairly rigid. The first operating window, from 1300 to 1700 UTC, turned out to be essentially unusable for me. After an FT8 session, operations switched to CW — a mode I do not operate — right up to the final minute. This led to frustration and a bit of sadness.

During this DX chase, I received tremendous support from Edoardo Marchisio, IK1TAZ. Every day he encouraged me to keep trying, fully aware of the regret I would face if I missed catching this train. Once the first window was gone, only the second remained,



Christian Diemoz's, IX1CKN, antenna set up in Vétan, which he used to make contact with Bouvet.

beginning at 2000 UTC — which, at this latitude in late February, meant darkness all over.

A few minutes beforehand, the expedition activity page showed the station positively charged, configured on 21.272 MHz. They would be back on SSB!

I got ready but initially heard nothing. Seconds later, a very weak signal started to emerge. Then suddenly I caught the call: "...KP5/NP3VI listening up 5." I called, and, incredibly, I heard back: "CKN... CKN..."

I came back again with my full call sign. The signal dipped into fading, but I understood they had also copied the IX1 prefix. I gave them the strongest "59" imaginable for the log, although I was understanding less and less as the signal weakened. Then I caught a "73 CKN..." before the operator moved on to another station — and within a second the signal vanished completely.

A message from Edoardo, who was listening from home in Piedmont, arrived immediately: "You're in the log!"

Though I was convinced, I still needed proof. I checked the expedition livestream page, and there it was: my call sign. I felt joy and disbelief.

I sent a voice message to Edoardo in which I think I was shouting — although I honestly do not remember what I said — and then contacted other longtime radio friends with whom I have shared countless moments over the years. The KP5 signal had started reaching me only seconds before the contact and disappeared back into the fading almost immediately afterward.

Once again, my Ozein launchpad toward the Americas had delivered. I dismantled the portable setup and

drove home still unable to believe that I was in the DXpedition log.

Bouvet Island, 3YØK

Only a few days later, Edoardo was already pushing me toward Bouvet.

"This is not the time to sleep," he texted me one morning.

This time, however, the situation was different. Unlike Desecheo, where I had not heard even a whisper from home, I could hear 3YØK quite well on my home station. I copied them on 10 meters — where I spent long mornings calling without success — but also on 12, 17, and 40 meters. In every case, though, despite hours of trying, I simply could not break through the pileup.

Portable operation again became the only realistic option — gaining elevation and opening the horizon so that the dart launched from up there would encounter fewer obstacles on its path to the bullseye.

Ozein, however, was useless for Bouvet. From my location in Aosta, Bouvet lies at 181 degrees, requiring a clear southern path — and from Ozein, the south is blocked behind massive mountains in the 3,000-meter range, such as Grivola and Pointe de la Pierre.

I needed to move to the opposite side of the valley — the northern slopes of Aosta Valley. Determining the right spot required terrain-analysis software. Considering both the takeoff angle obtainable from there and the presence of an opening between the peaks, Vétan, near Saint-Pierre (1,658 meters above sea level), became the obvious choice.



Christian's car on the side of the road in Ozein, where he made contact with Desecheo.



Christian's setup in the car in Ozein.

I arrived there at 1500 UTC on March 13. Once again, my companions were my FT-897 and quarter-wave vertical antenna.

My intuition about the location was immediately confirmed on 10-meter SSB by TT1GD and J51A booming in at well over S9. A quick check on 12 meters reinforced the feeling. Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, and Aruba were all coming through strongly on FT8. The same happened on 10-meter digital with Benin, Angola, and Brazil, confirming that the path toward the critical 181 degrees needed for Bouvet was open. What was missing was 3YØK.

Then, suddenly, it appeared on 24.922 MHz FT8. The CQ was strong. I answered. They copied me multiple times and sent me reports — even +1 on one sequence — but the iPhone app I was using did not support Fox/Hound mode. So, despite repeated attempts, and despite the remarkable patience of the operator on the island, I never managed to get the “RR73” that would have completed the contact.

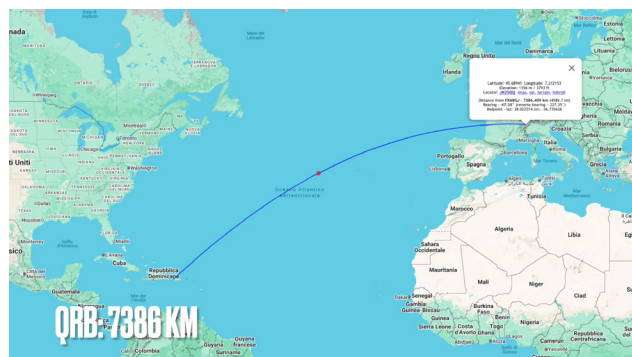
It was a disaster. More shouted voice messages to Edoardo followed — perhaps a bit too loudly. But once again, his “mental coaching” came to the rescue. From his home monitoring position in JN34, he noticed the DXpedition was completing contacts on 17 meters without Fox/Hound mode. That was the moment to go all in, because no SSB slots were showing up on the cluster.

I kept calling using the phone app. Being spotted in North America and the Caribbean confirmed that my signal was getting out in the right direction. The trace on the waterfall from that remote island was clearly visible on the waterfall spectrum — kudos to the team for bringing Yagis down there!

Then the signal peaked at +6 dB just as my smartphone displayed “IX1CKN 3YØK -03.”

It wasn’t a marginal report, so the contact shouldn’t collapse like before. I answered, and moments later saw “IX1CKN RR73” appear on the screen. It looked successful, but I refused to celebrate before the daily log update.

I drove back home, reassembled my home station, had dinner, and at 2059 UTC, Club Log delivered the verdict: the contact was in the expedition log.



 Hear Christian Diemoz's, IX1CKN, contact with Desecheo, KP5/NP3VI, on his YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/watch?v=knqp5SY1Q1U.

It was a huge moment of joy. It felt like the end of a difficult exam after weeks of preparation — a strange mixture of sleep deprivation, happiness, and “I never would have bet on this.”

For the second time in roughly 20 days, Aosta Valley — a land usually stingy with radio satisfactions (although other IX1 operators also managed to work Bouvet) — taught me that verticality, even with minimal equipment, can still be the right choice when chasing some of the rarest DX on the planet.

But there was another lesson, too. Talking with someone who shares your passion — Edoardo, IK1TAZ, in my case — is not merely useful. Sometimes it makes the difference between giving up and continuing to try — and succeeding.

Though I was already a strong believer in the portable way of living my passion, I now have more than 11,000 additional good reasons — one for every kilometer separating Aosta from Desecheo and Bouvet — to keep believing in it.

All photos provided by the author.

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