

Father and Son DXpedition to St Barts

This recap of a June 2013 trip to the Caribbean will chase your winter blues away.

Erik Martin, N5WR

I grew up with ham radio. It was part of the fabric of my childhood. One of my earliest memories is sitting on my dad's knee in his radio room, practicing writing my name on a sheet of paper, while he tuned the bands working DX. He would tell me where those strange signals were coming from and show me on the map he had on his wall. He would say, "This is a UA, from Russia," and I would watch as he pointed. "This one's a 4S7; he's in Sri Lanka, far away in the Indian Ocean." Those signals from half a world away, right there in my dad's radio room, seemed magical.

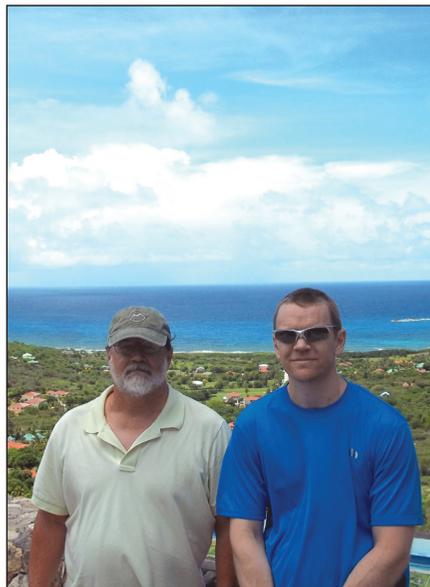
I grew up hearing stories about DXpeditions activating far off places. I used to look at my dad's QSL cards and dream of visiting those exotic places. I heard tales of danger too — DXpeditioners who were shipwrecked, even attacked by pirates.

I earned my ham license when I was 12 years old. With my dad's guidance, I learned how to operate and discovered the excitement of working DX. I remember coming home after school and working Asia and Oceania on 10 meters, and experienced the thrill of breaking a pileup. I began dreaming of being the DX myself, and my dad and I talked about someday going on our own DXpedition.

A First Effort

In 2011, my dad and I went on our first DX trip together. We went to Bonaire, and rented the well-known PJ4G contest station. It was a thrill to be on the other side of the pileup. The station was outstanding, with great antennas on the HF bands, and we had immense fun working the world. That experience made us all the more eager for another Caribbean adventure.

When we started thinking about planning another DXpedition, we decided that we wanted it to be truly our own. We wanted the



Jeff, FJ/K5WE, and Erik, FJ/N5WR, took some time off from the pileups to enjoy the many sights of St Barts.

experience of transporting our own equipment, setting up our station and antennas, working the pileups, and then tearing down for the trip home.

We looked at various locations around the Caribbean, and ultimately decided on St Barthélemy, familiarly known as St Barts. St Barts is an island in the Caribbean about 150 miles east of Puerto Rico. It is a volcanic island fully encircled by shallow reefs with an area of 8.5 square miles and a population of about 9000.

Through a travel agency, I was able to rent a villa in a good location, and obtained permission from the owner to put up our antennas. Finally, in June 2013, we set off on our father/son DX adventure.

Welcome to Paradise

We flew from the US to St Martin. I had worried that there would be trouble with the oversized baggage containing our gear, but we cleared customs in St Martin without incident. We took a ferry to St Barts to avoid the high excess baggage fees on a connecting flight. When we arrived at St Martin, a representative from the travel agency met us at the port with our rental car.

We arrived at the villa about 6 PM local time and immediately went to work unpacking our gear and assembling the K4KIO hexagonal beam (k4kio.com). At about 10:30 PM, I put out a CQ on 20 meter CW and was immediately greeted with a huge pileup. Dad got on about a half hour later, and we stayed up late into the night having a great time working the pileups.

The next day we went to work putting together other antennas — a 2 element 17 meter vertical array, an 80/40/30 meter vertical dipole, and a 30 meter inverted V. We had the pleasure of meeting Adolphe Brin, FJ5AB, who came by our villa to visit. Over the course of



The Martins' beam by the pool at the villa.



Here is Jeff, FJ/K5WE, chipping away at the pileup. Notice the group of band-pass filters on the table; these allowed the two stations to be on the air simultaneously and still play nice with each other.



The father/son QSL card confirming St Barts.

our stay we settled into an operating routine, with Dad generally operating in the morning, me later in the afternoon, and both of us in the evening. Using band-pass filters allowed us to operate at the same time without much interference.

Mother Nature and Mr Murphy

You can't have a DXpedition without a few antenna issues to troubleshoot. The first night I erected a G5RV in an inverted V configuration on a fiberglass mast. I fed it with ladder line connected to an MFJ autotuner. It was performing well on 30 meters when a tropical thunderstorm blew through, and I suddenly started getting RF in the shack, which caused problems with the rig. The next day I discovered that the wind from the storm had caused one leg of the inverted V to break completely. No wonder the antenna didn't work as well after the storm! I decided to replace the G5RV with a vertical dipole, which performed very well on 30 – 80 meters and withstood the strong winds much better.

All Pileups and No Play...

We did take time to see some of the sights. St Barts is a beautiful Caribbean isle with a strong French influence. It is a popular tourist destination yet manages to maintain a lot of its original charm. When we took breaks from the pileups, we took our car out on the winding narrow roads to visit the island's sights. St Barts also has many fine beaches where we often went for a swim to recharge for the next round of pileups.

The villa we rented was in a wonderful



Insect repellent and coffee were staples needed to keep Erik, FJ/N5WR, churning out those contacts.

location, high on the western edge of the island in the *quartier* of Columbiere. We spent an enjoyable week there; it was quiet, and we had a clear view of the ocean to the north and west. A gentle breeze blew off the ocean most of the time and there were brief rain showers nearly every day. From our operating desk we could see hummingbirds in the garden outside and a family of turtles visited daily.

A Good DXpedition

In 6 days of operating, we made 12,766 QSOs — 402 on SSB, 363 on RTTY, and the rest on CW. It was a wonderful experience and a very successful DXpedition. We are already thinking ahead to our

future DX trips and wondering — where should we go next?

Back at home, I feel that I have come full circle. I sit in my shack, listening to DX on 20 meters. My 4 year old daughter sits with me, practicing writing her name, while we listen together to those signals on the radio. I tell her stories about DX, just as my dad did with me when I was her age. I hope that in the future I can share with my children what I have had the privilege to share with my dad — the magic of ham radio.

All photos by the author.

Erik Martin, N5WR, an ARRL Life Member, was first licensed in 1989 as KB5KNX. He obtained his Amateur Extra class license within 2 years and received the call AA5WQ. In 1996 Erik obtained his current call sign. He is an active contester and DXer.

Erik graduated from the University of Tulsa with a degree in Electrical Engineering. He worked in the telecommunications industry for several years before going to medical school at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine. He currently lives with his wife and two children in Joplin, Missouri where he works as an emergency physician. Erik can be reached at 4705 S Jackson Ave, Joplin, MO 64804, erikmartin44@gmail.com.

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