

Rockall from the point of view of Don Miller W9WNV in 1968. As printed in CQ Magazine March '68. Don had decided to spend necessary time in the UK enroute to the Indian Ocean, arranging for possible future DX pedition operations, meeting the DX gang.

Spending about six weeks in Europe, he visited individual Dxers and groups in Norway, England, Germany and Switzerland. Clearing up “mysteries.” along the way and creating good will and favorable publicity.



The Rockall Mystery – One of the items to research was to solve the “Rockall Mystery.” For three years now we’ve been reading and listening to how this rock would be a new country but how impossible it would be to land there. First, we learned that the reason no Dxpedition has ever reached Rockall is because none has ever departed for Rockall. Two Dxpeditions in recent years did reach the planning stages, however; the plans for the first (By Ron G3AAJ) were cancelled due to lack of funds; the second failed to materialize when military assistance was denied because the British Fleet had more urgent commitments.

Next we learned that, although Rockall presents a most difficult landing, particularly without fine weather, it is by no means “impossible” to land there. This is supported by the fact that in recent years there have been two attempted landings and both have been successful.

Then, we had been mystified by various claims and photographs appearing in amateur publications; one showed a “90 foot wave breaking over Rockall.” W9WNV had done a fair share of sailing but never saw any wave approaching that height of 90 ft, even in the severest of storms. I asked a good number of experienced sailors from the North Atlantic and continued to do so throughout the rest of the world, but the only 90 foot waves ever claimed to be seen were during cyclones (not well documented) which don’t occur in that area. A closer look at the photograph in question revealed what must have been a normal 15 to 20 foot wave, breaking against the rocks on a windy day, with a fair amount of spray blown over the area. (Now known as a rogue wave 2012)

We were shown two excellent photographs of Rockall on a calm day; seas and winds were light and it would have been quite simple to merely step onto the edge of the rock. The leeward side of Rockall presents a handy ledge twelve feet above the sea, from which a ham station could be operated on a calm day.

Our entrage planned to charter a small fishing boat, well provisioned to allow for a considerable wait for fair weather if necessary, and to operate from the top of the island. We had planned to take along some experienced mountain climbers and let them scale the cliff first, dropping a rope ladder from the top for easy access by us and the equipment. Except in the worst of weather we could stay at the top, operating in shifts around the clock for a day or two and getting out quite well from that QTH with a vertical (beam if winds permit) and low power. As for AC we had decided to leave the generator on the boat and employ a 100 yard power cable via a small buoy to the operating position. We had already obtained confirmation from Bob White that this procedure would not violate DXCC rules. Our plans progressed quite well, but the license provided the shock which stopped us in our tracks! Continue on page two

Obtaining the license was no problem, the only prerequisite being a written OK from the Scottish Office in London, obtained without any difficulty, although they informed us we would have to notify the Commander of the Royal Artillery when we intended to sail, as Rockall is on a guided weapons range (now inactive.) Our license was issued but the call sign really threw us! Bill G5AIA and myself were given permission to operate from Rockall as GM5AIA/P and myself G5AEW/p. The problem was that, by using the GM call signs, Rockall would not be a new country it would not meet DXCC requirements for separate country status because it is only 375 miles from other “GM” Islands (Hebrides Is.) By open water, being no islands in between.

We had heard rumors that other Dxpeditions had planned on using “G” or “GR” call signs from Rockall Reef, which may have explained why it was considered for separate country status. However, the chief of the Radio Services Department, London explained emphatically that a “GR” permit would never be issued and that “GM” is the only call sign *permitted from Rockall Reef*. It was not quite clear, therefore, that Rockall did not meet the 500 mile requirement for separate country status. I had been through a similar ordeal with the Awards Committee a few years before regarding New Zealand’s off shore Bounty and Antipodes Islands – the rules were quite clear on this point. Neither of us wanted to get into any further squabbles with the Awards Committee.

Rockall Reef would count the same as Scotland and the venture wasn’t worth the time, money, or risk involved. We dropped the idea of a Rockall DXpedition, content that we had cleared up a great deal of rumor and misunderstanding. Of course the Committee sometimes conveniently ignores or invents rules and there’s no telling what could happen, but anyone who thinks that Don Miller could get a favorable consideration from the ARRL Awards Committee had better see his psychiatrist!

(Recently a group of British amateurs has obtained permission to use the “GR” call sign from Rockall Reef, however the island is still under Scottish administration.



Greenpeace occupation