

How's DX?

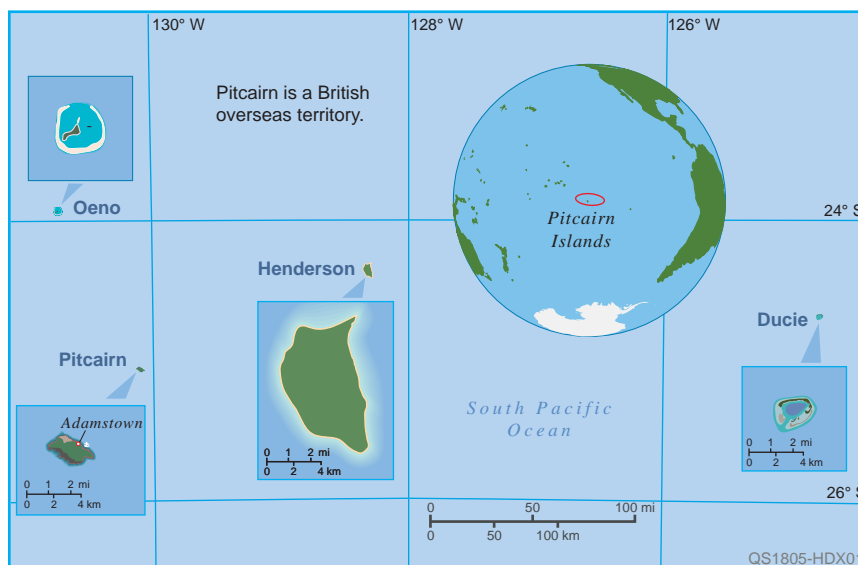
VP6D Ducie Island 2018 (OC-182)

Ducie Island is an uninhabited atoll in the Pitcairn Islands, located in the center of the southern Pacific Ocean approximately equidistant from Chile and New Zealand, both of which are several thousand kilometers away. It lies 535 kilometers (332 miles) east of Pitcairn Island, and over 1,000 kilometers west of Easter Island. The atoll is 2.4 kilometers (1½ miles) long, measured northeast to southwest, and about 1.6 kilometers (1 mile) wide. The main island, Acadia, is crescent-shaped, several hundred meters long, and mostly covered in scrub and low trees. There are also three small islets on the southern side of the atoll; Pandora, Westward, and Edwards. Due to its inaccessibility and landing permit requirements, Ducie is rarely visited today.

Among the Pitcairn Islands, Henderson Island is famous for its birds, but Ducie is also a significant breeding ground for a number of bird species. More than 90% of the world population of the seabird Murphy's petrel nests on Ducie (an estimated 250,000 birds), while pairs of red-tailed tropicbirds and fairy terns make around 1% of the world population for each species. Like many remote islands, Ducie is threatened by plastic pollution. A recent expedition to nearby Henderson Island found an astounding level of plastic debris being deposited there by the rotating current of the South Pacific Gyre.

Discovery of Ducie Island

Ducie was first discovered in 1606 by Pedro Fernandes de Queirós, who named it *Luna Puesta*, and then rediscovered by Edward Edwards, captain of HMS *Pandora*, who was sent in 1790 to capture the mutineers of HMS *Bounty* (although they did not find the mutineers on nearby



Ducie Island is just over 350 kilometers east of Henderson Island, which is just enough distance to qualify it as a separate DXCC entity from the Pitcairn Islands.

Pitcairn). Edwards named the island *Ducie* in honor of Francis Reynolds-Moreton, 3rd Baron Ducie, under whom he had previously served. In 1867, it was claimed by the United States under the Guano Islands Act, but the United Kingdom annexed it on December 19, 1902, as part of the Pitcairn Islands.

Ducie Island Added to DXCC

Ducie became a DXCC entity on November 16, 2001, after the Pitcairn Island Amateur Radio Association (PIARA) was accepted as an International Amateur Radio Union member-society. The first expedition was led by Kan Mizoguchi, JA1BK, in March 2002 using the VP6DI call sign. One year later, in March 2003, Kan again operated as VP6DIA. Ducie was last activated in February 2008 as VP6DX by an international team of 13 operators, using the expedition ship *Braveheart*. The team made an astonishing 183,584 contacts with 38,754

unique call signs. However, after 10 years of no Amateur Radio activity, Ducie has been climbing up the most-wanted lists and now ranks as Club Log's #21. Ducie is an All-Time New One (ATNO) for hams who became licensed after 2008 or who discovered DXing after the last activation.

VP6D DXpedition Announced

At the 2017 International DX Convention in Visalia, California, members of the Perseverance DX Group (PDXG) discussed several potential DXpedition opportunities. By the end of the convention, we narrowed down the list to Ducie, and had more than enough interested operators.

Our international team includes: Ken, NG2H; Les, W2LK; Gene, K5GS; Dave, K3EL; Heye, DJ9RR; Mike, WA6O; Vadym, UT6UD; Steve, W1SRD; Walt, N6XG; Laci, HAØNAR; Jacky, ZL3CW; Chris, N6WM; Arnie, N6HC, and Ricardo, PY2PT.

Like many restricted nature reserves, landing on Ducie Island for a DXpedition and overnight stay requires a landing permit (issued by the police and immigration office on Pitcairn Island), a travel visa, and, of course, a VP6/D radio license. Shortly after the DX Convention, we applied for the landing permit. The application included our plan for 14 operators, tents, generators, radio stations, and various antenna types. We received the permit in early July 2017 and immediately applied for the call sign and travel visas.

Our stay will be governed by a strict set of biosecurity and environmental rules similar to those we encountered on Campbell Island (ZL9) in 2012. One regulation states that fishing by non-residents of Pitcairn Island within the 12-mile limit is prohibited.

Getting to Ducie Island

For transportation, we selected the now-familiar expedition ship *Braveheart* from Tauranga, New Zealand. *Braveheart* and her owner, Nigel Jolly, K6NRJ, have a long history of providing outstanding support to the DXpedition community. *Braveheart* and Jolly's other vessel, *Claymore II*, visited Pitcairn Island many times as resupply vessels.

The team will meet in Papeete, Tahiti, and then fly to Mangareva, the easternmost major island in French Polynesia, where *Braveheart* will be waiting to begin the estimated 3-day journey, our equipment already loaded aboard. We will land on the main island, Acadia, located on the north and east side of Ducie. The transit will take us past Pitcairn Island, and, if there is time after the DXpedition, we will make a quick stop there to meet several descendants of Fletcher Christian, the famous leader of the mutiny aboard HMS *Bounty* in 1789.



The experienced crew of the RV *Braveheart* will get the VP6D DXpedition team to Ducie Island. [David Lloyd, K3EL, photo]

The Setup at VP6D

Antennas will include monoband 2-element rotatable vertical dipole arrays on the higher bands, four-squares on 30 and 40 meters, verticals for 80/160 meters, and two HF Yagis. The layout will be similar to that used by VP6DX in 2008, with the vertical antennas positioned close to the shoreline to take advantage of the "saltwater amplifier." CW and SSB camps will be separated by several hundred meters, to help reduce inter-station interference. The team will camp on the island, taking meals and sleeping in a small tent city.

Logistical support from the *Braveheart* will allow the operators to focus on their radio duties. Our equipment of choice is the Elecraft K-Line, and each station will be equipped with a linear amplifier. Our chosen logging program is *N1MM+*. Logs will be uploaded to www.vp6d.com at least once per day using the Inmarsat BGAN satellite. The plan is to have eight operating positions in two radio camps, 160 – 6 meters

(except 60 meters), and SSB/CW/RTTY/FT-8, including 6-meter Earth-Moon-Earth (which would be a first from Ducie). We are hoping to give new contacts to as many stations as possible, and to maximize the number of unique calls we work. Radio operations are expected to begin around October 20 and end on November 3, dependent on the weather.

Detailed planning for the project began in December 2017. Since then, we've been contacting equipment sponsors, and began our fundraising campaign with a generous grant from the Northern California DX Foundation (NCDXF). As of this writing, we're well into the project plan; team member assignments include the antenna plan, power and infrastructure plan, network and wireless design, emergency plan, scheduling, and more. For further information on the project and how to support it, please visit our website at www.vp6d.com.