

TM3NOI Noirmoutier Island Expedition 2014

Educational bridge for self-improvement in Ham Radio



Bridge between Noirmoutier Island and the continent



Logo of Noirmoutier Island Expedition 2014

Hello guys. My name is Geoffrey and I am 26 years old. I live in northern France. I started radio when I was 13 with C.B. radio. After a few years learning radio basics on 11 meters, I got my novice license in 2008 with the callsign *FOFVI* that was allowing me to transmit on VHF and got in touch with many ham operators. I was learning the french technician HAREC licence for one year in my Radio Club *F6KRS*. Thanks to the experience got in the Radio Club, on VHF and on C.B. Radio, I got my technician HAREC License in 2009 with the callsign *F4FVI*. My main interests are DXing on HF, antennas, propagations effects, APRS (HF, VHF, ISS), IOTA and ATV on 23cm. Just back from Noirmoutier Island Expedition (*TM3NOI*), I come back on the experience I acquired there.

I use to activate Noirmoutier Island every year since 2008. Twice on C.B. Radio, once in /P (portable) and four times with special callsign (*TM0NOI*, *TM1NOI*, *TM2NOI* & *TM3NOI*). Noirmoutier Island is located in the Atlantic Ocean, at the south of Brittany in the french region of Pays de la Loire, in the french department 85: la Vendée.

This island has many advantages; it is possible to join the island by a bridge or by a path in the sea at low tide; furthermore, Noirmoutier Island is part of the IOTA

group referenced as EU-064 by the *Radio Society of Great Britain*, what grants to this island -very close to the continent- a measure of interest on the air. Of course, Noirmoutier Island is not a "most wanted" DXCC, but the experience shows that each activity is a success and logbooks are well filled up.

For all these reasons, Noirmoutier Island is an educational bridge for self-improvement in ham radio for beginners and especially for young ham operators. Indeed, first of all, for economic reasons: the fact that it is not necessary to join the island by boat allows to save money and prevents ham operators from all material difficulties.

Secondly, the island has about 10 000 inhabitants and measures 49 Km², so it is big enough to find a little place to set up a portable station. Moreover, the island is mainly composed of salt pans what are -adding the fact that we are surrounded by salt water- excellent for vertical antennas for example.

Next, going to Noirmoutier Island for an expedition is formative in the way that it is necessary to think about what material will be necessary on the island, because once that you are there, you are alone; of course in a lesser extent on Noirmoutier Island because it is always possible to receive the help from ham operators from the mainland or from the ones living on the island very quickly; that is one of the reason why Noirmoutier island can be an educational place for beginners in ham radio. Indeed, it is necessary to think about antenna system, mast, transceivers, power supply (battery or generator), and in another way about food, accommodation, local authorities...



View of Noirmoutier Island from the sky

To go further in the didactic advantages of Noirmoutier Island, calling from this IOTA reference is quite different than calling from its own home QTH. Now you

are the searched station and it will be necessary to deal with different kinds of "pile-up". In that way this kind of expedition is instructive because it learns how to manage a "pile-up" and demonstrate the importance of listening on radio, for both island station and calling stations. According to the importance and characteristics of the "pile-up", different solutions can be applied; for a little "pile-up", getting one or two letter of a callsign is enough to catch a station, for a bigger "pile-up", it is possible to divide it by zone (For example, for a Spanish or Austrian "pile-up", zone 1, 2... it was very efficient when I got a spanish "pile-up" on 40m during one hour as *TM2NOI*) or by number in the callsign for a French or international "pile-up" ("QRZ callsign with number 2 only..."); and then for very big "pile-up" the split system can be used. (Transmitting on one frequency and listening on a precise frequency range; "QRZ listening 5 to 10KHz up/down..."). On Noirmoutier Island, I often divided the "pile-up" by number. Being able to manage a "pile-up" is also synonymous to be able to give every station on earth a chance to

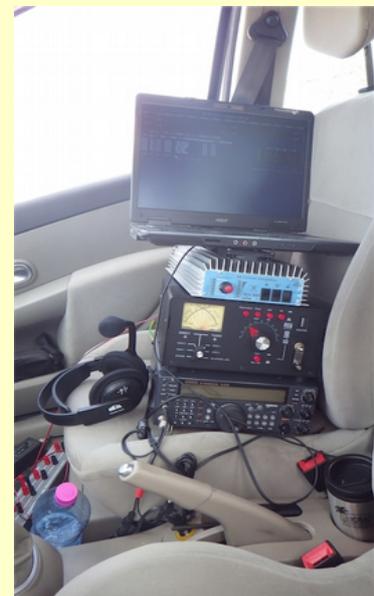


Photography of the mast used for TM3NOI

be in the log, something that I learnt this year. I was having a huge "pile-up" from Europe when I heard a weak station desperately screaming in the microphone "please listen South America". So I said: "Please Europe stand by, QRZ outside Europe" and I worked a QRP station from Brazil S4 and a few northern american and Japanese stations that were a bit too weak to break the European "pile-up" coming sometime with 20 or 30 dB over S9. For all these reasons, doing little expedition as *TM3NOI* is really didactic to learn how to operate on the air and understand the importance of listening and keeping the band as clear as possible.

All these considerations are not the only ones that are formatives; indeed, doing that kind of activity also allows to see and learn how works the propagation on HF. For all the activities made on Noirmoutier Island, I stayed several days there during

summer time. Alone or with a group of ham operators, choosing the right frequencies at the right moment is important, one more time, to give everyone a chance on Earth to be in the log, and to fill up the log of the expedition. If 10 meters band requires good propagation openings to be heard, 15 meters and 17 meters bands are mainly open during the daylight and give good opportunities of DX with Asia and Middle East (15 meters) and Eastern Europe (17 meters) from Europe. 20 meters band is open nearly all the time, but depending which part of the world you need to hear, it is necessary to choose some different time during the day and night. During the day 20 meters band will normally allow to work Europe whereas during the first part of the night U.S. stations will be heard more easily. So it is very interesting to jump on 20 meters band a few times during the day to get the best of the propagation on this band. 40 meters will allow to work local HF (350km - 1500km) depending the time you will be on it, as 20 meters band, but on a smaller area range of propagation. 80 meters is quite different for several reasons, first of all, at a technical side, because the antenna starts to be very big, and in /P, often very close from the ground (but that can be balanced by the good salt water reflection near the sea



Radio station used for TM3NOI in the car

coast), and at a physical side, because it will work only during the night, period that is very short during summer time apart of being really noisy. 160 meters is much more difficult and hypothetical for the same reasons than 80 meters but on a bigger size; it can be used punctually for stations worked on 80 meters that requires this band if you are not equipped correctly. Activating for a minimum of a complete day and night on the island will shows to beginners the evolution of radio waves propagation according to the time; it was highly formative, too.

All the anterior considerations are instructive from the point of view of the

activity on Noirmoutier Island, but doing such an expedition requires further preparation than the basic material considerations to be a success. Indeed, an expedition need to be prepared a long time before. In order to be chased, the main



All the material packed in the back of the car with the battery

point will be to publish the information about your activity enough time before the expedition and on the most diversified network possible. One or two month before the activity is enough. The information can be diffused by the traditional ways like official

associations, weekly or monthly books or via internet on blogs, DX website etc. What is really important is to create a dedicated webpage for the activity, for example it was on QRZ.com for *TM3NOI*, free and efficient, where people will find all the information needed, like location of the island, locator, equipment used, operator name, QSL information, bureau, direct, electronically, online logbook...).

All that bring us to talk about post-expedition period with the management of QSL card coming by bureau, direct or internet. The electronic QSLs are the fastest and easiest way to answer like with *eQSL* or *LoTW* (*Log Book of the World*) because they are free and ham operators receive them nearly immediately. According to direct

QSL card, my main mistake for *TM1NOI* and previous callsign used, was my lack of instruction on the webpage of the expedition: I was receiving QSL without address that was making me losing a lot of time to answer. So, since that time, an efficient policy is to ask on the website of the expedition for



QSL card for *TM3NOI*

Direct QSL card a Self addressed envelope with a contribution of €1 or \$2 in order to cover the postal cost, especially for world wide delivery. For example with

TM2NOI callsign, I received about 150 QSL direct from the U.S.A., what represents about €1.20 per QSL and a total of €180... Having clear instructions on the website will make you win a lot of time and will allow you an easier management of the QSL cards. Indeed, QSL card management also required to know how the QSL are going to be filled up, with a pen or with printed stickers and if the second solution is chosen, which software you will use, kind of stickers etc... My main mistake was to think that I would have received all the QSL card very quickly, but I was far from the true. Today, I still receive QSL from 2008!

Crossing the bridge that connects Noirmoutier Island to the continent allows to jump into a new dimension of ham radio for beginners or young ham operators and it is really an educational bridge for self-improvement in Ham radio in all the different aspects of the hobby, from the technical side (material...) to the scientific considerations (antennas, propagation...) and way of transmitting on air (time, team, band, pile-up...); but the most important thing to discover is the beauty of the ham's spirit during that kind of event and, of course, to have fun!

Best 73s

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