ON THE ISLE OF MAN AGAIN

STORY OF GB3CUW/GD6UW, MARCH, 1963

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THIS is the fourth year that the Cambridge University Wireless Society has mounted an expedition to the Isle of Man during the Easter vacation. It might perhaps be pertinent to explain why the C.U.W.S. repeats its trip to GD. Unlike proper DX-peditions, the primary aim is not to hand out large numbers of QSO's for DXCC or WABC, or whatever. The active stations on the Island do much more of this than ever we could hope to—our aim is to have an enjoyable holiday and at the same time gain operating experience. The improvement after ten days on the Island in a recently-licensed operator's technique on the air has to be seen to be believed.

Every year there are new members of the University wanting to go somewhere and a few members who know the ropes on GD, so it is only natural that we should again make for the Isle. The Easter vacation is the best time except from the point of view of the generally rather poor VHF conditions. However, the Summer Vacation is out of the question, since members of C.U.W.S. may be doing anything from hiking around the States to selling ice-cream on the beach !

This year we travelled over to the Isle by ship from Liverpool on 21 March. Miraculously, all the gear got to our boarding house in Douglas without any losses. In the party were: G3NUH, G3OQP, G3OYW, G3PIT, G3PKB, G3RSE and SWL's Bibby, Burden and Towers. G3MZM and G3PWT joined us later. We managed to get two stations running simultaneously—on 160m. and on the HF bands, both under the call GD6UW (with the approval of the G.P.O.). For Snaefell, where our VHF station was scheduled to operate from March 26, the Post Office had issued the special call GB3CUW.

HF Bands, GD6UW

The Hammarlund Co. of New York very kindly sent over a new HX50 transmitter so that we could try our hand at SSB and this, coupled with a K.W. Electronics KW 77 receiver made a very fine set-up. However, initially we had some trouble on SSB, and got back comments such as "I think that funny noise is calling me." The fault was not in the loading of the Tx, which was very simple due to the ingenious circuitry, but a bad connection in the microphone lead was introducing a tremendous hum. This foxed us for some time, until with the help of GD3GMH it was put right. Reports on the quality of the Sideband signal were then excellent (even from those stations who did not want a GD QSL !). In the time that remained we had a good number of QSO's including over one hundred in the *CQ* SSB Contest. Surprisingly, we were not able to establish any prolonged pile-ups in the Contest. Presumably our low power 50 watts p.e.p. got lost in the tremendous QRM, and there were a great many EU prefixes in competition with us.

The HX50 also performed excellently on CW. Frequent reports of T9x were received (and not all from QSL seekers, either). Several times we made more than 30 QSO's an hour and the record was 50 contacts during one hour of the ARRL Contest.

The KW 77 performed magnificently, whether on SSB or CW. And we soon became adept at tuning in an AM station in the SSB position and dodging the QRM simply by switching to the other sideband. Judging by the amount of DX we were hearing on the KW 77 we thought propagation conditions were excellent. However, the locals all said conditions were fair only, and when they handled the receiver they realised why we had been misled !

The Mosley V3 Junior trap vertical, mounted at the top of the house, worked as well as ever, giving us all-round coverage and low-angle radiation. As an efficient, compact aerial for 10m., 15m. and 20m. it is hard to surpass. For 80m. and 40m. we used a tuned doublet.

In all we made about 920 QSO's, mostly on 20m., but with a few W/VE stations worked on 80m., both SSB and CW, and experienced some nice EU and W pile-ups on 40m. CW. We managed 52 countries and would have worked more if we had searched for DX rather than fished by calling CQ.

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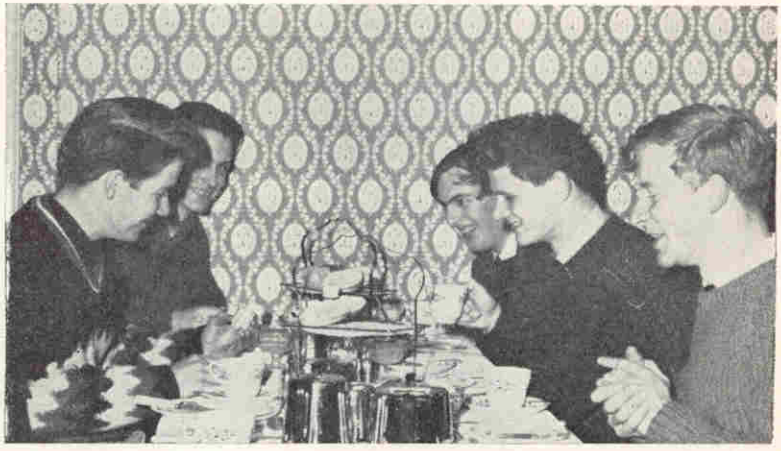
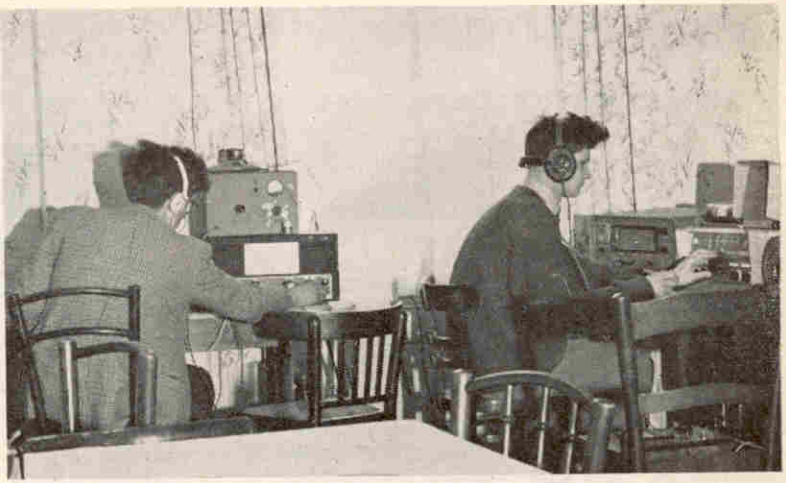


The boys who did the work to keep GB3CUW/GD6UW on the air during the C.U.W.S. Easter DX-pedition. Left round to right : SWL's Towers, Bibby, G3PWT, G3MZM and SWL Burden — there were several others in the party, not included in this particular tea-time group. Between them, they made more than 1,200 QSO's on all bands 2-4-20-40-80-160 metres — and had a very good time into the bargain, with much valuable operating experience gained.

Top Band

Here we were using a Labgear Topbander Transmitter end-feeding a bent 264ft. wire through an ATU, with the voltage node about 30ft. above the ground. This combination worked very well, both for G's and EDX. We had good U.K. coverage on CW from about 1600. On phone we worked into the London area with S8 reports when conditions were good. In Europe we worked quite a number of OK's and also DL's, HB9T and OH3NY. Heard but not raised (despite much patient work by G3PKB) were ZL3RB (peaking RST-559), 5A3CJ and of course W's. An old S.640 was used on the receiving side, except of course for the real DX pulled in on the KW 77. In all about 250 QSO's with 9 countries resulted on 160 metres.



A general view of the HF and Top Band station at Douglas, I.o.M., signing GD6UW, with G3RSE at the 160m. rig on the left, and G3MZM operating on the HF bands, for which the gear consisted of a Hammarlund HX-50 CW/SSB transmitter and KW-77 receiver. For 160m., the transmitter was a Labgear Topbander and the Rx an S.640.

VHF—GB3CUW

At GI3HXV's suggestion we decided to go on four metres this year. However, the converter we built refused to neutralise, and progress on the transmitter was very slow. G3EDD came to our rescue, and through the Pye Telecom. Amateur Radio Group (G3PYE) the loan of a 4m. Tx (35 watts) and a converter (IF 3·2 to 3·4 mc) was arranged.

On passage to the Island the converter collected a heavy blow and the RF amplifier neutralising coil was completely smashed. Another former was obtained from an old TV set, the coil rewound, and with the help of GD3FXN and his signal generator the coil was trimmed.

Everything was connected up on the top floor of the house, but no QSO's resulted from GB3CUW/A as the second-channel QRM from the BBC TV transmitters two miles away was overwhelming. But G3PJK in Manchester reported us S6 on 4m. when the aerial was resting on an iron bedstead and firing through a terrace of houses !

A party from the expedition arrived at the Ministry of Aviation Radio Station at the summit of Snaefell at about 2 p.m. on the Tuesday, March 26, and had a very busy time erecting aerials. The J-Beam 5-ele 4m. Yagi was mounted on a make-shift mast about 12ft. off the ground. Rotation was a two-man job. The J-Beam 6-over-6 for 2m. was put inside a wooden lattice tower about 25ft. up or 2,060ft. above sea level. Manual rotation was very easy, due to the light weight of the assembly, but it did involve climbing up a ladder, which in darkness with a gale blowing and everything iced up, was not too pleasant. Both these J-Beam arrays stood up to the conditions very well and worked excellently.

The VHF station at the Ministry of Aviation site on the summit of Snaefell, I.o.M., with G3RSE in front of the 4-metre gear (lent by the Pye group) and SWL Burden (left) doing the logging. GB3CUW was the callsign on four and two metres, the gear for the latter band being Withers throughout, with an Eddystone S.940 receiver as IF/AF strip. Some 17 stations were worked on 4m., and 45S on two metres.

Four Metres

At 1820 we switched on and heard GI3HXV calling on sked at S9 off the back of the beam, which was then firing SE. He was duly worked for what is believed to be the first 4m. QSO ever made from GD. Immediately after-

wards G3PJK was worked S9 both ways, then G3AYT/M, mobile in Hyde, Cheshire. Later that evening GM3FYB was raised (S9 both ways) on the 130-mile path over the Scottish hills. Subsequently, a number of G's and GI's were added in, also GW3MDY for our first GW QSO. Despite GI3HXV's attempts to arrange a sked for us, we didn't manage to get into EI.

We worked 17 different stations on 4 metres and the best DX was G3EHY at about 210 miles. Unfortunately, we had not arranged any skeds with the Home Counties and despite calls on CW and careful listening, we heard nothing from the south-east.

Those who wondered at the shocking quality of the audio on the first few nights will be interested to learn that this was due to the use of a pair of headphones as a microphone. The 2K moving-coil mike was temporarily inoperative as a result of someone pulling the lead off the insert !

A close-up of the Top Band station for the GD6UW Easter vacation expedition, G3RSE of the Cambridge University Wireless Society in charge. Some 250 contacts were made on 160m. and many U.K. operators made it with GD for the first time.

One point to would-be 4m. operators we suggest from experience is that the surplus crystal that gives a frequency of 70·29 mc be avoided, for this is the QRM channel, which we have heard sounding just like 80m. on a Sunday morning—four or five deep.

Two Metres

Here we were using the very compact Withers gear, a TW2 10-watt Tx with PSU, and a Nuvistor converter. This performed excellently both on phone and CW and all the QRP seemed to be getting out despite the poor-to-average conditions. We used Bob Towers' 416B preamp. (complete with forced-air cooling) to give that extra dB or two on DX signals, and we were receiving stations very loudly. As the IF/AF strip, 28-30 mc for two metres and 3·2-3·4 for Four, we had an Eddystone 940, with which we were very impressed. Its good selectivity and crystal filter made all the difference on weak signals. SSB stations were very easy to resolve, and the smooth drive mechanism and the logging scale were a joy to use. The latter once calibrated made possible accurate frequency checking for skeds.

After several "half" QSO's we raised G3FAN who, with G3EVV, was our best DX at about 280 miles. G3EDD of Cambridge and some Midlands stations were worked, the remaining contacts being in the 60-100 mile category.

We actually heard several Home Counties stations and we know a few heard us, so we should have raised much more DX. The reasons why we didn't probably lie in the fact that only two of us had any previous experience of VHF working (and that was one evening on last year's trip). To be convinced of this you only had to hear us "working" a DX station who was not hearing us, or not copying the reply from a station to whom we had given an S7 report! The first evening when conditions were best for DX, there were so many local stations calling us that we went on to phone to work them, and later—what with up to 3 inches of snow, gales, rain, and water in the coax connectors—DX signals seemed to go down.

By Sunday night, March 31st, when we closed down, GB3CUW had worked 45 stations in the five surrounding countries.

Conclusion

Monday, April 1st, was taken up in packing the equipment, and the main party left Douglas on Tuesday morning after a very enjoyable trip. By the time this is published, all QSL's should have been sent out *via* the bureaux. Any direct cards should go to G6UW *(QTHR)*.

Our thanks to the locals for their help and advice, particularly, in addition to those already mentioned, GD3EGF, GD3HQR, GD3PRO, and the local QSL manager GD3ENK.

To the manufacturers: Hammarlund Co.; K.W. Electronics, Ltd.; Stratton & Co. Ltd.; Withers Electronics; Labgear, Ltd.; J-Beam Aerials Ltd. and Mosley Electronics Ltd. (and of course the G3PYE group) our sincere thanks for the generous loans of equipment, without which the 1963 C.U.W.S. foray to GD would not have been possible.

The most outstanding thing that a trip like this teaches one is that the nebulous thing called the "Amateur Spirit" really exists and can be relied on to come into play when difficulties arise or help is wanted.