

# FP5KE Saint-Pierre et Miquelon 2025 DXpedition

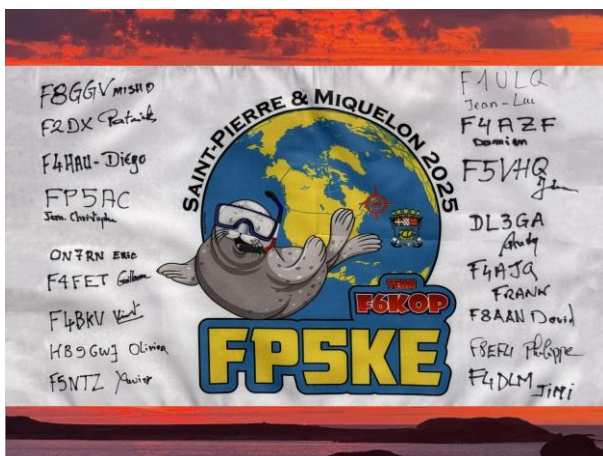
F2DX, Patrick Bittiger

For the past 25 years, the Provins Radio Club F6KOP has organized a yearly DXpedition to a highly wanted destination. In December 2024, less than a month after returning from 9L5A (Sierra Leone), F2DX - who was known as FP5DX from 1988 to 1991 - got back in touch with his old friend FP5AC to plan a 16-operator expedition to Saint-Pierre et Miquelon.

From the very first discussions, the choice naturally fell on Île aux Marins, located close to Saint-Pierre but offering a good take off in every direction and far enough away from the city's radio noise. However, we needed to be fully self-sufficient in accommodation, power supply and logistics, which required even more meticulous preparation this year. The only rental house large enough to host such a team and offering enough space for all our antennas was Maison Marie-Ange. An initial contact was made in late 2024 with the local "Association de gestion du patrimoine".



Our team was quickly formed with 16 operators from F6KOP, all experienced DXpeditioners except for F4BKV for whom this was the first one with our group: F2DX (CW and leader), F1ULQ (SSB and co-leader), F4AJQ (DIGI), F4AZF (SSB), F4BKV (SSB and SAT), F4DLM (DIGI), F4FET (SSB and EME), F4HAU (SSB), F5NTZ (CW), F5VHQ (SSB), F8AAN (CW), F8EFU (CW), F8GGV (CW), DL3GA (CW), HB9GWJ (SSB and SAT) and ON7RN (CW). FP5AC was in charge of the enormous logistics workload.



Over ten months my exchanges with FP5AC multiplied as there were many issues to resolve like accommodation, supplies, power generation, and transport. « Every problem has a solution » is Jean-Christophe's motto, and we owe him the success of this expedition thanks to his dedication and his extensive network of contacts. Thanks to our solid reputation, many sponsors and individual donors offered their support, even though FP ranks only 104th in the most wanted DXCC entities. We are very grateful to all of them, especially since costs were particularly high this year. At the last minute, for instance, we had to charter an Air Saint-Pierre plane to return to Newfoundland (a €7,400 expense), as the scheduled boat trip was cancelled. This was the only way to not to shorten the expedition.



In the latest months, our equipment was prepared, tested, and packed at F6KOP under the supervision of F5PBM while finances were meticulously managed by F5GVA and F5GSJ. This crucial work was carried out not only by the operators but also by several club members who were not part of the DXpedition team but were essential to its success.



Thanks to a 30-page document that I constantly update, each participant has access to all the detailed information, both logistical and financial, and also commits by signing a charter. Another important task this year was to compile an ATA (temporary export declaration) where everything is listed and numbered, from the transceivers to the smallest cable or tool. Since Saint Pierre and Miquelon has a special customs status, this official document will really simplify our trip with nearly one ton of equipment spread across about forty luggages (including five oversized bags for masts and antennas).

Those coming from far distances meet on September 13, 2025 evening at a hotel near Roissy. It's the perfect way to get into the spirit of the expedition. On the morning of September 14, we all meet at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris where F5PBM and F4JCT join us to deliver the one-ton shipment of gear. Everything has been carefully planned and everyone normally knows which bag they're responsible for, but F1ULQ and F8EFU systematically check that the distribution is correct (and will continue to do so at every stage).



Then, our forty equipment bags must be cleared by Customs, as well as the sixteen personal bags of the operators but everything goes smoothly (thanks to the French Customs).



At 11:35 AM we take off for St. John's (Newfoundland, Canada), landing six hours later with a 4.5-hour time difference with France. After going through immigration, we head to the Air Saint-Pierre desk. The airline, one of our sponsors, kindly helps us with the check-in despite our large number of bags. After a one-hour flight we fly over l'Île aux Marins and land at Saint-Pierre airport, but Murphy has joined the trip too: eleven bags including all the antennas and amplifiers were left behind in Canada due to the ATR-42 being overweight!



On the afternoon of September 14, after a short ride on a chartered bus, we arrived at the dock to board the « P'tit Gravier » ferry which was also privately chartered as the regular schedule didn't fit our needs. Ten minutes later we reach l'Île aux Marins and all the equipment is carried to our house one kilometer away, using a trailer and a small tractor. (Many thanks to Axel for his invaluable help).





FP5AC did the shopping in advance so we had everything we needed to pass the first two days. We had planned to set up all our antennas on September 15, but we didn't get the 11 missing pieces of luggage back until early afternoon but with another visit to the airport customs and an additional chartering of the boat, which increased our budget by another 250 euros.

Dominique and Franz had prepared stakes and electrical wire in Saint-Pierre several weeks earlier. On the afternoon of the 15th all coax cables and several antennas were installed until sunset while F1ULQ supervised the setup and configuration of the stations. We decided, however, to start operating only the next day once all twenty antennas were in place as we needed a well-rested team for that. At sunrise on the 16th, after a good night's sleep, the full team was back in the field under the supervision of F8EFU with whom I had previously defined the position of each antenna and the layout of our 1,000 meters of coaxial cable.



In the end we lost one night and an entire morning of operation since our first QSO was logged on September 16 at 17:44 UTC (13:44 local time). We will now have to double our efforts as our goal remained to reach 100,000 contacts. From that moment, each operator simply had to follow the operating schedule carefully prepared by F8EFU (and his YL Martine!) and give their very best.

Unfortunately, the house's diesel generator supposedly rated at 15 kVA only delivered about one-third of that! FP5AC immediately took the point and, thanks to the well-known solidarity of the Saint-Pierre community, managed to find two backup generators the next day. We operated this way for a few days until an electrician from Saint-Pierre came to make the proper connections on the main three-phase generator (thanks Stéphane and Jean-Patrick). However, to protect it and avoid any bad surprises, we decided to run our eight stations at reduced power during the entire stay.



As soon as their HF shifts were over, F4BKV and HB9GWJ, our two satellite specialists, went on the hunt for QO-100 even climbing a large rock to get the best possible angle. But after many attempts from various spots around the island it became clear that with a negative elevation of  $3.2^\circ$ , we would never be able to reach QO-100. Still, there was some consolation: 118 QSOs were successfully made via low-orbit satellites.





F4FET, our EME specialist, who built and brought along an ultra-light 12-element 144 MHz antenna of only 3.4 kg, set up in a small shed near the house and began his « bagpipe » sessions, while still doing his HF shifts which remained the priority. During our stay, 56 QSOs were made via the Moon, quite a good result for F6KOP's first attempt at EME during a DXpedition.



In charge of communication, photos and video, I try to fly the drone as often as possible but it's almost always close to stalling as the wind ever blows on Île aux Marins. It would stay like that during the entire stay, except for half a day when the best aerial footage was finally captured.

Each day, one operator is assigned to kitchen duty and household tasks. When supplies are needed, that person must also take the regular ferry to Saint-Pierre, where FP5AC takes care of transportation. We also made an arrangement with the "Association de gestion du patrimoine" (which manages both the house and the island's only restaurant, usually closed at this time of year) for their chef to prepare our lunches. (Many thanks to Christophe for his kindness and the variety of his dishes).

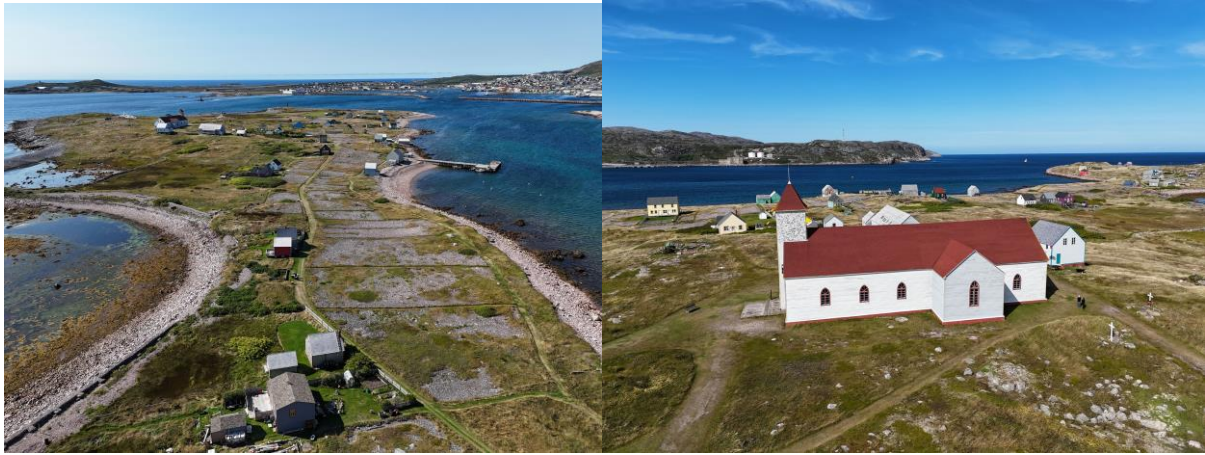


We regularly receive visitors, including the local press and television who closely follow our expedition. Several great articles, reports, and even live broadcasts are produced. Whenever we go to Saint-Pierre, it's impossible to go unnoticed as everyone has heard about the radio amateurs on Île aux Marins. The local gendarmerie command, representatives from the Prefecture, a school group, and several residents of Saint-Pierre also came to visit us, curious to learn more about amateur radio.



Outside operating hours, the team members take the opportunity to explore Île aux Marins which I personally can hardly recognize after 35 years, as most of the wooden houses have since been beautifully restored. The island is amazingly well maintained. The colourful houses are mainly occupied during the summer and on weekends. Only about ten « pieds rouges » (red feet) live there for most of the year, and we quickly form strong bonds of friendship and mutual help with them. In the evenings, Maison Marie-Ange turns into a warm and lively meeting place, where we share a good locally brewed *Miqu'ale* beer, but radio traffic never truly stops with at least six operators always on the air.



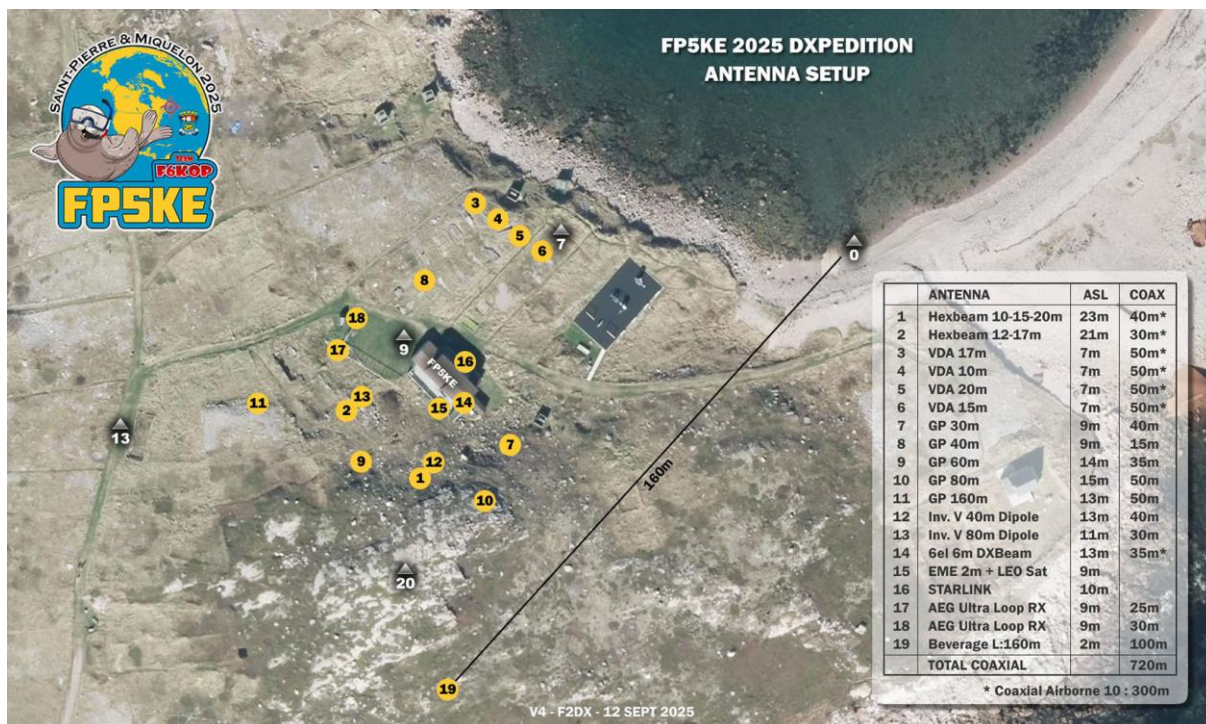


For comfort, the house is well equipped with plenty of room for our eight HF stations, all set up at a good distance from the shared living area. We brought our own sleeping bags, and the operators sleep upstairs in three dormitory-style rooms. Water management, however, requires strict discipline as rainfall has been scarce this year and the storage tanks are far from full. It is naturally agreed that everyone will take only a very quick shower (in the only bathroom with hot water) at most every other day.



For the low bands, we set up quarter-wave verticals on 30, 40, 60, 80 and 160 m, and two inverted-V dipoles for 40 and 80 m. On the high bands, we deployed two Hexbeams which, thanks to a triplexer on one and a duplexer on the other, allow us to operate all five high bands simultaneously. These are supplemented by four monoband VDAs.





This setup gives us two antennas on each HF band, enabling true *in-band* operation (two stations working simultaneously on the same band in different modes). This is made possible by adequate antenna spacing, opposite polarization, and band-pass filters. For low-band reception we added three highly effective antennas: two Vertical-Array loops and a 160-meter Beverage, using a kit supplied by SO9I Engineering.



Contrary to the propagation forecasts prepared by F4HAU and VOACAP, we were pleasantly surprised by excellent openings on 10 m and 12 m allowing us to log 14,000 QSOs on each of these two bands.

With a storm approaching, we definitely left Île aux Marins on 26 September, a bit sooner than planned and spent the night in a hotel in Saint-Pierre. On the morning of the 27th, we boarded our « private plane » to St. John's (Newfoundland, where the airport security staff kindly provided us with a locked room to store all our luggage. We spent the day in St. John's before our flight to Paris, scheduled for the middle of the night.





A true pilgrimage for radio amateurs, we were determined to visit Signal Hill, the legendary site where Guglielmo Marconi received the very first transatlantic radio transmission. Welcomed by Chris VO1CH and Frank VO1HP we even had the privilege of taking turns operating VO1AA, the official Signal Hill station located inside the Cabot Tower. The day continued with a tour of St. John's and several nearby locations.





In 9 and a half days on the air, FP5KE logged a total of 131,604 QSOs across 164 countries, averaging 13,850 QSOs per day (577 per hour). Our goal of prioritizing human-operated modes was met, as of 60% of the log. Our only disappointment was the complete lack of propagation on 6 meters despite having a well-positioned 6-element antenna. By comparison, during 9L5A last year in Sierra Leone, we logged 4,000 QSOs on 50 MHz.

We are pleased to report that we have experienced no equipment failures. The expedition was fully equipped with Acom amplifiers which proved to be reliable and robust from start to finish and we thank both ACOM and PROSIC for their support.



Beyond the extensive preparation, the equipment deployed, the experienced operators and the operating strategy, one crucial factor is the harmony within the group, especially when fatigue arrives. In this regard, once again this year it was a complete success, and not by chance.

You can watch the DXpedition film at the following address: <https://youtu.be/t3DOW2gdB1Y> and you can find more information about the DXpedition by visiting our website: <https://fp5ke.wordpress.com>

F2DX, Patrick  
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