



The Treshnish Isles are a remote chain of islands and skerries situated in south-west Scotland. The archipelago lies, at its closest, 3 km west of Mull (EU-008) and extends along a northeast-southwest axis for a distance of 11 km. These islands are exposed to the open ocean, uninhabited and have no good landing sites, hence the presence of vibrant wildlife communities. They are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) and are also designated as a Special Protection Area on the Conservation of Wild Birds. As such they are protected by law with it being an offence for any person to intentionally or recklessly damage the protected natural features of the SSSI / SPA, the breeding seabirds being one such feature. The erection of tents poses a collision risk to seabirds when breeding adults are visiting their nesting burrows at night to feed their chicks. Breeding colonies of Manx Shearwater and Storm Petrel are widely distributed across Lunga, hidden amongst the bracken and boulders and on the plateaus and slopes. Access to Lunga Island is administered by the Hebridean Trust who have strong concerns about the potential for disturbance to breeding seabirds. The trust's Council of Management does not support requests to overnight during the Bird nesting season (March to September ).

During summer months, Lunga is visited daily by some of the many tour boats that operate within the area. Some of these boats even come ashore; however, only have permits to berth up to a maximum of 3 hours. Past operations from here have only been during these times and therefore didn't make a huge impact on meeting the demand for EU-108. Gil, F4FET, was the last to operate from here back in May 2014 where he made 220 QSOs all on 20m SSB in the 2 hours he was ashore. Prior to that, was the GB5TI operation that took place back in 2011.

In fact, at time of our operation, not forgetting about the EU-085 activation earlier this year, and according to Annex H part 2 of the 2016 IOTA Directory, the Treshnish Isles EU-108 is now the second most wanted island group in Europe behind Rockall EU-189.



Our interest in activating Lunga began over 2 years ago, when a simple email request to Hebridean Trust was submitted. As with some of our past activities, these requests often go unanswered. It's only logical that we keep submitting these applications until we get the result we want! In this particular case, we actually got permission for a joint effort with a BBC film crew who were doing a project on Lunga in July 2015 – our problem was that this permission letter didn't reach us in time as it was actually Mid-September 2015 when it arrived! Naturally, we persuaded the nice lady to issue our approval again for 2016.

Now we had the necessary permission in hand, it was time to put a team together and plan for our activation in early September. Permission to overnight would not be issued any sooner. As nearly all equipment was coming from Echo India, it was thought worthwhile to load up my Jeep with all the necessaries and see what space we had available. Thankfully there were 2 spare seats so Jeremy EI5GM and Declan EI6FR soon had their Dibs on them! We would be driving from Cork to Belfast, getting the ferry across to Cairnryan, driving to Oban where we would be meeting with Col, MMONDX and Scott, MM0LID - shortly followed by Nobby G0VJG who would complete the 6 man team. Nobby and I are both founder members of the UK Islands Group and therefore wanted to use the MSOUKI callsign. Note, (It was 2 years to the day since we last signed MOUKI from Longstone Island EU-109)

The local tour operator Turas Mara was quite obliging and helpful during our enquiry stages. This was the boat company that would be bringing us to Lunga. Usually, they depart daily from Fionnphort on the Westerly side of Mull, and run a ½ day tour that takes in all the local sights / scenery. Although they also do private charter, we were advised to take their regular tour and to book online. There is a surcharge for those who wish to overnight on Lunga and must pay an additional 50%. Unfortunately, we learnt that we would be half the day on the boat as part of the tour before we could land on Lunga and it

could possibly be the same upon our return. Time was limited enough as it was, without this additional delay. None of us wished to take in the tour and to spend 6 hours un-necessarily on-board! With just 2 weeks before our deadline, our communication with Turas Mara broke down as we failed to get anyone to speak to. Dozens of emails went unanswered along with unanswered telephone messages. Surely our project wouldn't fail just because of Turas Mara? Luckily, Col found a local company based in Oban called 'Coastal Connection' who take pride in doing one off and unusual charters! They have 3 enclosed ribs available for private hire and although worked out more expensive (£500 each way) these ribs would depart from Oban rather than Mull and thus we would be saving the Cal Mac ferry fare too. This new crossing would however take 2 ½ hours each way as it was 45 miles by rib!

It was soon time for this adventure to begin and for us to begin our departure. Each one of us left our homes all en-route to Oban. The 3 El's by ferry, Nobby was flying to Glasgow while Col and Scott were both within driving distance. Everyone's attention turned to the weather forecast which was not looking too good for our intended dates. Soon after, and almost 500 miles later, we arrived in Oban and needed to pick up the last few bits. Petrol for the generators needed to be filled locally along with the necessary water and Irn Bru! Col was next to arrive and soon after Nobby made contact saying there was a delay in his car hire but was now on his way. Struan, our boatman was already on the pier with the rib and so we all mucked in and began loading the boat. All the electronics/fragiles went inside whilst still leaving enough room for the 6 man team. The boat was now loaded and just in time for Nobby to arrive with the last of his baggage.



We were now faced with a new problem though; there was no sign of Scott MM0LID. Not only that, there was no communication with him – no one could get in touch with him either. All telephone calls were going unanswered. Scott was bringing a second generator with him as our hired Honda EU-20i would not be enough for 2 high power stations along with everything else. Also, he was the one bringing the most fuel with him (he was the local after all). Now we were 1 generator down and didn't have enough petrol even for the Honda. Another quick scurry around Oban for fuel cans and petrol and we just had to make do with what we had. Time was now against us as it would be dark shortly and therefore we just couldn't wait any longer. Thoughts of Scott being only moments away were on

everyone's mind, however, we needed to depart – right then. This pretty much changed everything, we now needed to change our station plans. We had much more equipment packed now than what was needed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Acom wouldn't be used for example and we were a few chairs down too. Still though, we were way too deep into this project now at this stage to fail. A team of 5 could still do a good job and we could still run 4 stations.

Sea conditions were a tad on the rough side....and after over 2 hours now in the rib, we got the 1<sup>st</sup> sighting of Lunga. The landing would not be easy – it was now high tide. There is an old, rusting pontoon out in the bay that we used as our transfer point. All equipment needed to be transferred into a small rib first to get ashore. It was rather challenging at times to keep your balance on this pontoon whilst at the same time keeping the equipment safe and stable. Once everything and everyone was safely landed on Lunga, we then needed to get it all off the rocks and onto the next level. This was rather treacherous to say the least as the risk of falling was high. To maximise our QSO count and to reach our goals, we needed to focus on our NA / JA friends and to give out EU-108 to those who needed it as an ATNI (all time new Island). We decided to set up camp on the upper level of Lunga. This would be much more work and many many trips up and down the mountain would be needed; however, we still felt it would be worth it. Once on that upper level, our view to NA/JA really opened up.



All 4 operating tents were set up within minutes. There were the Coleman Tourer 4 man tents which are pre-assembled and have a 60 second set-up time. These now provided shelter for all equipment to be inside from the elements. By now, it was pretty much pitch black outside and so in the interests of safety, it was considered a bad idea to try to erect antennas on a cliff edge in darkness. Instead, we would all get a night's sleep and begin station set up at first light. Sure enough, at about 05:45 am, just

as the sun started to wake up, all 5 of us were eager to get the 1<sup>st</sup> station on the air. Our 20m vertical was up in record time and SSB 1 was set up so Col could begin CQing. We wanted to world to know that we had actually arrived and made it. The following hours were spent erecting the Hexbeam and the rest of the antennas. By mid-afternoon, all 4 stations were QRV. 40m, 30m, 20m and 17m were the bands of choice. We had 2 stations on CW and 2 on SSB.



Although there was a lot of interest in our project (as you can imagine from Europe's 2<sup>nd</sup> most wanted) huge pile-ups were non-existent. Yes, we did get some nice runs, however, propagation was absolutely lousy. Our activation coincided with both the SSB field-day and the All Asian contest. We knew that many were needing us as a NEW IOTA, however, a lot of time was spent CQing. Suddenly a loud West coast station would call you with a real 599 report both ways and then nada again for a few minutes. Openings to Japan was the same....you'd work a dozen JAs and then silence again. That's pretty much the way it remained for our duration. At times, even the DX stations were louder than our DL and Italian neighbours! We began to doubt our antennas and equipment and so we phoned a few of our EI/UK friends who assured us that we were doing just fine. One even commented that he wasn't even hearing the stations that we were working! After hearing this, we were all glad that we did decide to operate from the upper level. It was worth the effort.



Now, if we had only known on what was about to come. Later that night, the winds picked up and as predicted, we got the tail end of Hurricane Karl. All stations shut down and tried the best we could to sleep. We woke with an eerie silence at about 05:40 am and found all our antennas down (except for the Hexbeam) along with our Kitchen tent that had been flattened. Every fiberglass pole had been shattered! Our Hexbeam was leaning at a 45 degree angle! Naturally, all our efforts were to get the antennas back up as soon as possible and to put the stations back on the air. This was our greyline pretty much so the 30m and 40m antennas were the 1<sup>st</sup> to go back up. Rather than spend too much time on the Hexbeam, we decided to remove it instead – it had already done it's job and we had a 20m vertical anyhow. All stations remained active as propagation allowed besides, there's not much else to do on Lunga. This afternoon turned out to be rather nice with just a few scattered showers. However, the sea conditions looked rather poor. Our boatman had given us an ultimatum – he advised for us to depart later that evening. The following night had high winds & lightening forecast again. He could not guarantee our collection the following day if we decided to stay. This pretty much forced us to shut down and begin the station tear down. So much equipment and work for such a short time. Some of the team were on a deadline and needed to be back in their homes/ jobs on time – it was just too risky to chance staying any longer.





It remained pretty calm for the packing up but as soon as we started bringing everything down to the shoreline things changed for the worse. Our boatman just couldn't come out soon enough! I'm sure that Lunga is a nice place on a nice summer's day; however, in autumn it's a different story. Now we know why it's Europe's 2<sup>nd</sup> most wanted. It's difficult to get permission to overnight, and when you do, it's out of season so you are exposed to all the elements of Mother Nature. Secondly, it's hard to get a boat to bring you and your equipment out, not to mention the expense. To help compensate this expense, a team of a few guys is needed to share the costs and workload. Tent and generator activations are difficult for a reason - there's just so much extra equipment needed to bring and haul around. To get the best operating position one needs to climb up the side of the mountain to get to the upper plateau. Up there, one is even more exposed and at the mercy of the elements. All in all, every aspect of it is a challenge. Still though, despite of all these obstacles, we managed over 3,200 QSOs in about 30 hours of operating time. Many of these were uniques and needed us for an All Time New IOTA (ATNI). We got nice emails of support from some W6's that worked us along with some of the JAs that we worked on 40m who thanked us for our efforts. Conditions seemed better to some DX areas that they did to EU...perhaps our take off angles were just too low! Hi!



Returning back to Oban was uneventful. Everyone soon got into the rhythm of the motion of the rib riding the waves. Thankfully no-one got seasick – I guess we were all too busy dreading the unloading of the boat once ashore. Here it would be another struggle to pack everything away before getting a local hotel for the night. Our logs were merged and sent to Charles M00XO our QSL manager for him to upload to LoTW and to open the OQRS. The QSL card has already been designed and will be ready for mailing shortly.

As with all good activations....talks soon turned to 'where do we go next ??' All I can say for now is.....Watch this space!

vy 73 de Dave EI9FBB



