

Contesting

I embarked on an exciting solo DXpedition to Grenada in November, operating using the callsign J38W. The trip, from 23 November to 2 December, was a significant milestone in my amateur radio journey. It was my first solo DXpedition.

I had previously been on several team DXpeditions and have achieved good scores in the CQ WW DX CW Contest in the Single Operator All Band category. The trip to Grenada was a challenge as I would have to be self-sufficient and carry all the equipment that I would require with the main aim of the trip to enter CQ WW DX CW from the island.

With its lush landscape and rich cultural heritage, Grenada provided a stunning backdrop for my adventure. I prepared thoroughly, ensuring that I was well equipped to make this DXpedition a memorable experience both for me and for the global amateur radio community.

Location

I chose Grenada for a few reasons. The island is easy to reach, with regular flights from London Heathrow and London Gatwick at reasonable prices. On Grenada, often referred to as the 'Spice Island', the amateur radio licensing process is simple and enabled me to secure a local short callsign – ideal for contesting.

Grenada stands 154th out of 340 on the Clublog most wanted list, making it desirable on all bands. Yet the island has only a few resident amateurs and is infrequently heard on the air. This made it an attractive place from which to operate for the CQ World Wide CW contest, as I would likely be a unique or rare multiplier on all bands.

I had previous experience in both single and multi-operator contesting and several DXpeditions in teams. This time I was eager to tackle a single-operator contest DXpedition, which was an opportunity for personal growth and exploration.

Equipment

I had acquired a lot of useful equipment from previous team trips so preparations were not too extensive. I chose to use my six-band Hex beam antenna which had served the 8R7X

team very well during our trip to Guyana in 2024. Mounted on a 10m aluminium mast, it provides an excellent, lightweight solution for a solo operator to erect single-handedly.

With limited low-band equipment, I contacted amateur radio equipment and supplies retailer DX-Engineering and asked if they would be interested in supporting my adventure. The company was very happy to help and provided the necessary equipment to get me started.

I had wanted to build a Battle Creek special for the 160/80/40m bands however, due to working long hours in my day job, I could not make this work. I eventually settled for parallel verticals for 160/80m which were provided to me by the TO4K team following their success with the antenna in CQWW SSB. I then chose a simple quarter-wave vertical for the 40m band which was on a short pole with elevated radials. Finally, having previously had experience dealing with tropical QRN, I reached out to antenna supplier Ham Parts, which kindly provided a beverage on ground (BOG) which I used as my receive antenna for the low bands.

Once all equipment was tested and packed, I ended up with one ski bag weighing 30kg, one checked bag weighing 30kg, a hand-luggage rollaboard bag and a backpack, which made transportation as a solo operator manageable. I incurred some overweight baggage fees as a result of having two 30kg bags but the overweight penalty was still cheaper than paying for a third checked bag in each direction.

The journey

I travelled from my home in Staffordshire to London Gatwick where I stayed in an airport hotel overnight ahead of my departure for Grenada. Checking in was straightforward and the staff were very accommodating to all my extra luggage. After some breakfast and a not so short walk to my gate, I was away.

The flight was ten hours long with a short lay-over in St Lucia, where some passengers disembarked before the journey to Grenada continued. After landing, I hurried through customs and immigration and soon had my luggage. I collected my rental car and drove 1.5 hours to the Sauteurs in the north of Grenada. Once checked in I arrived at my cottage by 8.30pm. It was already dark outside so I set about getting the shack ready for antenna work to start in the morning.



PHOTO 1: J38W antennas amid the palm trees on Grenada.

Setting up and operating

I awoke at 5.30am, before sunrise, and as soon as the first light appeared I went outside and built the Hexbeam. It took around two hours to set up the mast, guy ropes and the antenna (Photo 1) and I immediately went on air to make the first calls as J38W.

Pile-ups in Grenada are strong. There is a clear path to both North America and Europe and being on the north side of the island gave me a clear take-off over open ocean to these areas. Due north gets Asia and the Far East too.

The following morning, I again woke at 5.30am intending to make a head start before sunrise. I set up the verticals for 40, 80, and 160 metres. The 40m vertical went up easily on a short 10m pole and was operational within about an hour.

The real challenge was with the 18m Spiderbeam pole. I extended it gradually, laying it down until about two-thirds of the pole was upright. I attached the clamps and the wire for the 80m element, along with a pulley and some rope. Then, I stood the pole upright and guyed it at the very bottom to keep it steady while I pushed the last three segments into place.

This method works well when you're alone. But I learned a lesson the hard way...

Everything was going smoothly until I reached the final section. As I pushed the pole upright, I accidentally lifted the base off the ground. At that moment, a gust of wind blew the pole sideways, causing it to fall into some bushes. Thankfully, the gardener rushed over with his machete to help clear the area.

After that brief setback, I refocused and on my second attempt got the 18m pole upright. I secured the guys and then hoisted the 160m element up using the pulley. SWR was adjusted and that was all the antennas working.

Summary - J38W						
BAND	QSO	DXCC	ZONE	DUPE	POINTS	AVG
160	127	33	11	0	298	2.4
80	506	62	14	3	1244	2.5
40	1210	88	27	12	3080	2.6
20	1553	97	35	24	3591	2.3
15	1430	91	29	17	3586	2.5
10	1423	83	25	15	3668	2.6
TOTAL	6249	454	141	71	15467	2.5
FINAL SCORE: 9 202 865						

TABLE 1: J38W's CQWW CW claimed score.

I spent my week flitting between radio and holiday, making sure I had a drive around the island to do some sightseeing, trying local food and getting a feel for Grenada. Despite enjoying the island as a tourist, I still made a good number of QSOs before the contest.

Operating in CQ World Wide DX from Grenada was an unforgettable experience. From the beginning, I decided that as a single op I wanted to do an all-band entry. I had always planned to take an amplifier as I wanted people to hear me well enough over the top of big contest pile-ups. Given that this was the last CQWW in which I would qualify for the youth overlay, it made sense to have a go at the record.

I decided on a loose strategy of working the low bands until European sunrise and then getting some sleep – North America would be there when I woke up. Then the plan was to maintain the most presence during EU opening times and sleep when all I could work was NA. (EU contacts were worth more points.)

As a single operator doing an all-band entry, I faced some pretty intense pile-ups. The excitement kicked off with fast-paced calls flooding in from all over the world with the rate in the first hour hitting 240Q/hr, and let me tell

you, the signals were loud and clear.

I was getting into the groove and managed to work stations from Europe, Asia and the Americas. The thrill of answering calls in rapid succession was like a rush, with each successful QSO fuelling my adrenaline. It truly felt like a race against time and every contact was a win.

The contest was not without challenge as the low bands were particularly difficult. Everyone's signals were roughly the same strength and, with many operators calling at zero beat, it made it tough to pull out callsigns to work.

It has been a number of years since I last contested from the Caribbean – Bonaire as PJ4V for WPX CW in 2018 was the most recent – but my return to the region did not disappoint.

I dismantled the station slowly over two days, getting everything neatly rolled up, packed away and ready for my departure. By the evening of 2 December everything was packed.

I am extremely pleased with the results from Grenada. In the contest I logged 6,249 QSOs scoring over nine million points.

This is a QSO count and a score that has never been achieved from the UK – Ed.

New records

As a result of a good contest, I am claiming two new CQ WW CW records: firstly, the North America youth record; secondly, the Grenada single-op high-power record. This is the last CQ WW contest in which I will be under the age of 26 so it was my final 'Youth overlay' entry for this contest. Outside the contest, I made 4,753 QSOs in SSB, CW and FT*. This brings my total QSO count for this ten-day solo trip to 11,002 (Table 1).

I've considered a few things which I might do differently if I were to have a similar trip. I would want to be louder on the 40m band as some of the pile-ups became too big, causing me to have to move around a lot. Perhaps next time, I'd take a second 12m pole and run a two-element parasitic array.

I felt that, on the higher bands, I was loud enough to sustain a reasonable rate throughout and I was happy with the performance of the Hexbeam. Finally, given my simple 160/80m set-up I am very pleased with the result and likely wouldn't change anything on the Tx side. I would like to have other Rx options available, however.

My thanks to the amateur radio community for providing me with good sport during my stay on the island. Without people calling me, this would have been a very boring DXpedition and I hope that I've been able to fill some band slots.

A huge thank you also to DX Engineering [1] and Ham Parts [2] which provided essential equipment for this trip. Also, many thanks to Charles Wilmott, MOOXO [3], a good friend of mine who I've known since my early days in amateur radio. He is managing my logs and the ongoing QSL cards for J38W (Photo 3).

References

- [1] <https://www.dxengineering.com/>
- [2] <https://hamparts.shop/>
- [3] <https://www.m0oxo.com/oqrs/>

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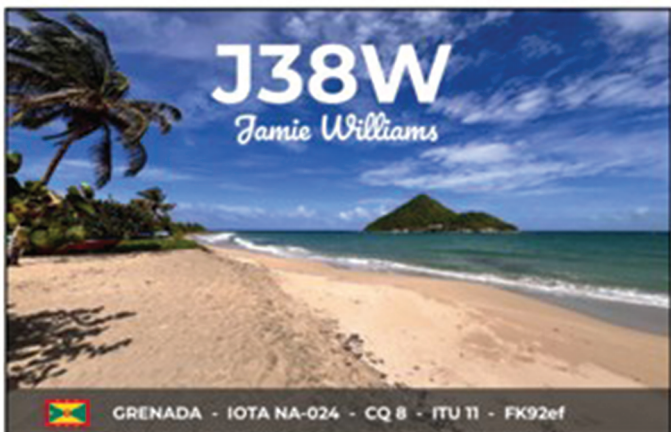


PHOTO 2: J38W QSL cards.

