

It was a warm day in Antigonish when the local repeater, VE1RTI, crackled to life “this is W1BKR Henry Island, VE1 – is there anyone listening??” I answered back to the strong, professional voice, with my callsign and a pleasant “this is VE1DSS, the name is Craig and I am located in Antigonish”. This was the first of many conversations that Bill W1BKR and I had, throughout the years. I found out that he and his wife Jeannemarie, K3JGB, were vacationing from New York on a small island off Port Hood, Nova Scotia. He stated that although he had a cell phone, the 2m repeater at Fairmont, Nova Scotia, VE1RTI, was his emergency communications path, and would I keep an ear to the radio for the next few weeks, just in case they required it. Several large storms have rolled though and I always had done my best to keep extra attention to the airways when my friends were on the island. We have had great conversations about radios, internet and life in general. The offer was made every year from Bill W1BKR to come over to his island and spend some time there.

At a meeting of the Antigonish Amateur Radio Club in July 2024, we were discussing what activities our small club would like to do this summer. Someone brought up POTA (Parks On The Air) or ILLW (International Lighthouse/Lightship Weekend), as both are quite popular here. One of our members, Jeremy VE1JEZ, who is an avid sailor, suggested that, because Henry Island has a working lighthouse and is an island that doesn't have anyone on it most of the time, it might be a great place to setup a HF station on and work the ILLW this year. Everyone agreed and the idea of the Henry Island Excursion was hatched. The main drawback was that I had not heard from Bill W1BKR yet this year...would he be vacationing there this year?? Is he still able to travel or still interested in being the lone occupants of an island? I agreed to try and reach out to him via email to check if his plans included a little vacation to Henry Island.

On August 6, 2024, the base radio at my shack in the Electronics Workshop at St. Francis Xavier University came to life “this is W1BKR Henry Island, VE1 – is there anyone listening??”. Bill W1BKR and Jeannemarie K3JGB are back on the island for a few weeks. I chatted with him for a bit and asked him what email address I should use to send him some information. I confirmed that I had a good address and sent him a request to allow a small group of amateur operators (4-6) to setup on his lighthouse for a day on the weekend of August 17-18, 2024. He was very excited to accommodate us and elaborated on how to access the island. It would be via a 27 foot zodiac that would bring us and our gear to the beach on Henry Island, as there was no wharf. There was no power grid, but we could use his batteries. He had a few requests, that we help setup his new Carolina Windom antenna and Icom IC-7300, and if we could bring with us a little gasoline to run the generator, distilled water for his batteries, paper cups and enough extra food to feed him and his wife. We chuckled about that and told him we would take care of it. It was decided that we would

try for Saturday August 17 if the weather was good, rain date for Sunday August 18. Our small group sprang into life and we divided the workload evenly...I offered my new Yaesu FT991A as a spare radio, while others were bringing the rest of the equipment that we needed for the activation. Evan VA1ECM offered to bring food for supper from his farm, Little By Little Farms, consisting of homemade chicken burgers, pork chops and potato salad. We were informed that there was a small half mile hike to get from the beach to the lighthouse and it was fairly steep too, an increase of 300 feet in elevation. Bill's W1BKR 4 wheeler and small utility trailer would be available to bring up our gear up to the site.

Bill W1BKR had informed the local people in Port Hood, Nova Scotia, that the local ham radio club will be doing an activation of radio equipment on the island and he welcomed them to come over to see not only the club in action, but also tour the lighthouse, his home and spend the afternoon on the island. Some would be brought over in a larger boat while others would come in their own watercrafts.

Saturday morning came, and it was a perfect day forecasted, sunny warm and no chance of rain. There was five of us that met at the local Tim Horton's at 8:00am – myself VE1DSS, Jeremy VE1JEZ, Mike VA1KMA, Evan VA1ECM and Paul, who is studying for his license after taking the online RAC course. We figured out the carpooling arrangements and headed for Port Hood to catch our boat to Henry Island. Everyone was super excited to be going on our little excursion and hopes were very high that our trip would be all we dreamed for.



We were met at a private harbour by our captain, Donald, who had agreed to take us to Henry Island. We loaded our gear and hopped into the zodiac by 9:30. The trip should take about 25-30 minutes...and were told to hold on tight...it could be a little rough. The trip over was uneventful but the smell of the saltwater and small breeze heightened our excitement of the adventure that we were about to have.

We were greeted by our hosts, Bill W1BKR standing by the 4 wheeler and Jeannemarie K3JGB wading out to grab the line from the zodiac in water that is above her knees. Bill's W1BKR first words were that we were a great looking group and who was the ringleader – that Craig VE1DSS fella. I introduce myself and the others. I have not sure if I have ever met two finer people in my life – Bill W1BKR, who's voice is so strong and professional, is 82 years old and been in broadcasting for many years and his lovely wife Jeannemarie K3JGB is a young 80 years old. Both are full of life and the greatest hosts our group have ever met. Bill W1BKR welcomed us to his island and gave us a little history lesson on the island and

its lighthouse. Evan VA1ECM took the task with driving the 4 wheeler up to the site loaded to the brim with all our equipment, as we walked up, chatting with our new friends.



At the end of our journey through the woods, we are presented with a stunning sight of a red and white small house with matching outbuildings and lighthouse.



All look newly painted, and lawn is mowed and trimmed. The weather was perfect – not a cloud in the sky and a nice sea breeze. We found out that there were no nasty bugs, including ticks, on the island – a true paradise. I learned that Bill W1BKR with assistance from Jeannemarie K3JGB have already setup the antenna from the railing of the lighthouse, and new radio. Bill W1BKR had made a few contacts already. The inverters, normally used in his power grid, were turned off as they were noisy on HF. We assessed the situation and found that the best place for our equipment was in the base of the lighthouse, out of the direct sun and a nice sea breeze came though the open door and windows. We setup the Yaesu FT-991A on an antique table, that normally holds relics from the island, and we ran a power and antenna line from the upper stories to our new radio room. Jeremy VE1JEZ setup his WSPR node set at .2 watts on the lawn close to the lighthouse.

As we prepared for lunch, I had the privilege to make Bill W1BKR a lifetime honorary member of the Antigonish Amateur Radio Club. He



happily accepted our invitation and Jeannemarie K3JGB was very excited for him too. She explained that although she has never talked on the radio, she studied and passed her technician license as a surprise birthday gift for Bill's W1BKR 75th birthday. Wow.

After lunch, as we started making contacts, the locals arrived. There were about 40-50 of them, of all ages from about 8 years old to senior citizens, and we explained who we were, what we were doing and about the ILLW contest. There was a gentleman playing a guitar and singing down by the house while we were making our contacts all



over the world. Each of our members had some seat time behind the radio, and as one of our members is unlicensed, there was another operator logging the contacts. The afternoon was productive, as we logged about 30 contacts, and chatted with the interested public. The airwaves became a little crowded as the American QSO party contest started, but we searched out a few memorable contacts each. When not in the radio room, we took the opportunity to check the local 2m repeaters to see how many we could make contact with just using our portables. There were quite a few including VE1RMW, our local Fusion repeater.

The afternoon went by quickly, and by 5:00pm we started to breakdown our equipment. We removed the radio and put back all the antiques where we found them. As Bill W1BKR and Jeremy VE1JEZ were configuring the new IC7300 to work with Winlink, Evan VA1ECM and I started BBQing supper. His handmade chickenburgers, along with the porkchops, were cooked to perfection and along with the potato salad were served on the outside picnic tables just outside the house. The meal was topped off with a homemade apple pie made by my lovely wife, Heather. She made two, one of which we left for our hosts.



As the sun started to set, our crew loaded all our gear back into the trailer to take back to the beach. The weather held out – it was calm, no wind, no rain and still warm at 8:00 pm. The boat ride was again wonderful, and the picturesque sunset was stunning. Along with the smell of the sea, these are some of the memories that our group will never forget and the new friendships that we made that day will live on until the day we die.

Bill W1BKR and I have chatted a few times again since the expedition. He and his lovely wife will be going back home soon but I promised to keep in touch with him during the winter, and as always, if they ever need anything, just holler, and we will help in anyway possible. 73 Craig VE1DSS

