

*January 2026*



2025 PEARs Supper Evening at the German Club, Lorraine, Port Elizabeth

This Newsletter is published by the Port Elizabeth Amateur  
Radio Society

Editing by Ashley Goosen ZS2AG

**QSX-PE - Newsletter for the discerning Radio Ham**

PEARS Monthly Meeting will be on  
17th February 2026 at the German Club.

## From the Chair



Dear Members

Happy New Year, fellow hams!  
Wishing you clear frequencies,  
great propagation, and plenty  
of on-air fun. I trust you have  
all had a good break during the  
holidays and are feeling re-  
freshed for the new year.

This year will be fully packed  
with events, contests and club activities. Of course, the big event  
will be us hosting the 2026 SARL AGM in Port Elizabeth on the  
weekend of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May.

Preparations are well under way for the AGM, the venue being the  
Willows. A sub committee has been formed to help with the prepa-  
rations, and if you would like to help, please speak to me. We can  
always do with another pair of hands.

Award nominations, motions, discussion points and council nomi-  
nations must be submitted to the secretary of the league by no  
later than the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2026. The nomination forms for the  
various awards can be found on the SARL website. These must  
be submitted to [secretary@sarl.org.za](mailto:secretary@sarl.org.za). Also, if you would like to

join the SARL, there is a half year rate special, please visit the League's website. Join the SARL, it is the right thing to do.

February will see the Club doing communication for the Herald Mountain Bike race. If you are available, please speak to Tony, ZR2TX. Camping will be available at Hayterdale.

Please also support the Monday night bulletins, by tuning in at 20h00 to the Lady Slipper repeater. The bulletin compilers put a lot of effort in and they would appreciate it if you call in to say hello!

Until next month, see you at the monthly meeting

73,

Kevern, ZR2BK

## **FROM THE EDITOR**

Here's hoping you enjoy reading this 1st edition 2026 of QSX. If you have an article or two that you would like published in future copies of QSX, please let me have your contribution by email to [qsx.zs2ag@gmail.com](mailto:qsx.zs2ag@gmail.com).

Please do not send me QSX material on WhatsApp as I am inundated with WhatsApp messages and I will miss your material.

Thank you for your continued support of QSX and the articles you have submitted for this issue.

73,

Ashley ZS2AG

# Journal: 2025 Lesotho SOTA DXpedition

By Brandon Zietsman ZS6LZ  
and submitted for publication by Vaughan ZS2VR

## Part 2: The Expedition

In Part 1 [[click here](#)], I covered the planning, technical, and preparation phases of this on-foot expedition across the Drakensberg/Maloti Mountains, straddling the South Africa–Lesotho border. This journal tells the story of the expedition itself, as much for me to remember the detail in years to come, as to share it with those who may find it interesting.



The hike would take six days and cover roughly 100km, with the objective of activating ten 10-point peaks along the route. Matt, ZS6MDV, who provided logistical support from base camps in both Lesotho and KwaZulu-Natal, has penned a separate article describing his experiences.

## Getting there

The two of us departed Johannesburg on the afternoon of Monday the 15th of September, with the Toyota fully laden. While my kit needed to fit into a backpack, Matt's requirement was, if necessary, to be able to establish entirely self-sufficient base

camps, complete with tents, independent power supply and a substantial amount of gear.

We reached Nottingham Road well after dark and checked into Rawdon's Hotel. Fortunately, the restaurant was still open, and we were able to order top-notch ribeye steaks to accompany the outstanding beer brewed on site. In the morning, we procured an extra stash to see us through the following two nights in Lesotho.



We chose to take the more direct Lower Lotheni (P27-2) dirt road to Sani Pass, rather than returning to the N3 via Howick and taking the R617 through Bulwer.

This stunning and remote drive follows the base of the escarpment in a westerly direction. The peaks towered over us on our right as we drove in the opposite direction to the way I would be walking just two days later. Staring up at them from a distance, the idea of being up there and communicating with the world using portable radio gear felt quite abstract.

After a quick stop in Underberg to pick up a few last items, we headed to the South African border post at the foot of Sani Pass. The process was refreshingly informal, and the drive to the top was as spectacular as it was uneventful. Once our passports had been stamped on the Lesotho side, we stopped for a bite to eat at the “Highest Pub in Africa” before continuing north to Sani Stone Lodge. The weather was clear, but the wind was a concern, gusting at more than 40 knots, or around 80 km/h. We proved to be the only people at the “lodge” - basic, but appropriately rustic. Matt and I shared a rondavel, which we divid-



ed into two sleeping areas, a cooking area on the floor and a table to set up a radio station.

While there was a small fireplace, there was only sufficient wood for an hour or two of heat, and it was bitterly cold. With the dipole up outside and coax through a slit in the

window, Matt was able to make many ZS and DX contacts as 7P8MW. I used the time to prep for my walk the next day.

## Day 1 warm-up – the Hodgson’s Peaks

The two 10-point Hodgson’s Peaks lie to the south of Sani Pass, in the opposite direction to the main hike. This would give me an opportunity for a warm-up day to test my equipment while carrying the minimum gear, with the evening back at the rondavel to prepare my pack for the next five days and sort out any glitches. The GPS route over the two peaks was about 11.5 km, with the walked distance usually about 15–30% longer, depending on the terrain.



## Hodgson’s North KN-011 (3251m)

First up was Hodgson’s North KN-011, first activated by Sid ZS5AYC, Adele ZS5APT, and Christo ZR6LJK in 2014. I was able to get to the base of the mountain quite quickly and was on

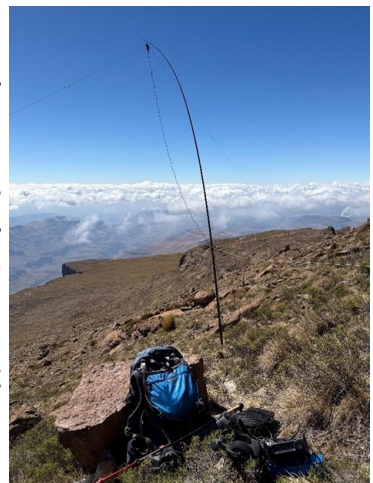
the summit before 9:00. The view down into KZN was spectacular, with the wind being my only worry. With the Venturi Effect, which accelerates the wind around and over mountain obstacles, the sailor and glider pilot in me estimated the wind to be close to 100 km/h, too much for the antenna and portable mast. I relayed this information to Matt on 2 m, who had set up at the top of Sani, and said I'd have to look for a spot in the lee of the peak, out of the wind.



This turned out to be the modus operandi for much of the trip, as the wind was unremitting higher up on the peaks, with only a few lulls. Fortunately, I was able to find sites where I could get close enough to the

summit so that the top of my 6 m pole and linked dipole could peek over the top (the SOTA “activation zone” lies within 25 vertical metres of the highest point of the summit), and had no problem copying the ZS1 stations “behind” the mountain.

With the peak lying inside South Africa, I operated as ZS6LZ. For a mid-week activation, the interest in this trip from chasers was inspiring, with 61 contacts made in just over an hour. The 10 m band was barely open that



early in the morning, but I was able to pick up a Japanese station and several in France,

Germany, and Sweden. There is always time pressure when you are doing multiple activations in a day, and I had to keep moving because clouds were already building over KZN. It was time to pack up and head to my next target.

## Hodgson's South KN-010 (3251m)



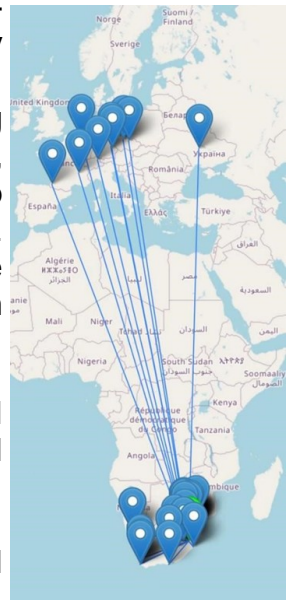
It took me about two and a half hours to get off KN-010, up KN-011, and on air again by 1 PM.



This peak was activated by Sid and Adele, with Lucas ZS6ATC and Magda ZS6MMS, in 2018. With my best efforts on Google Earth, the track I created on the south side proved to be a poor option. Even though I am a climber, this is a “hiking” peak, and I knew this was too technical when I realised I was using my hands too much. I topped out in the wrong place, down-climbed, and then scrambled up a more sensible route.

Only on my way down did I pick up the standard route on the north side, which would have saved a lot of time.

After taking in views from the summit, I again found a sheltered spot to deploy and wasted no time as the weather was building. In just over 30 minutes, I had 47 ZS and V51 contacts in the log on the 40 m, 30 m, and





20m bands, before switching to 10 m to target the DX chasers. After 11 European contacts, something completely unexpected happened

– my battery died. These Bienno LiPO? batteries are outstanding, and I had previously run three back-to-back activations at full power on the same battery with no issues, and these were brand new, sponsored by Bienno for this trip.

I was perplexed and worried, because I had budgeted my battery reserves carefully based on experience. All I can say is that without this “trial” day, the expedition would have been in trouble. After recharging the battery that evening, I decided to top up the other three new batteries, and each took between a 60- and 90-minute charge, when I thought I’d fully charged them at home several days earlier. They performed flawlessly on this trip and since, and I had ample reserves.

The timing of the battery issue would prove to be academic. In



the blink of an eye, the clouds from KZN rolled over the escarpment and visibility soon dropped to 20–30 m. I packed as quickly as I could, following the rocky descent via a route I had not used on the way up. The secret is to spot the occasional small rocks placed on conspicuous boulders that mark the route, and follow the general direction until the next sign emerges from the mist. Once off the steeper ground and back on my GPS track, I could pick up the pace.

As luck would have it, when I intersected the tar road, Matt was right there with the Toyota.

That afternoon the two porters, Sphamandla (34) and Pila (24) from Drakensberg Hikers, were dropped off at Sani Stone Lodge. Their role was to share the load and look after bags at the base of the mountains, avoiding the need to carry full packs to every summit. As I wanted to be able to operate at a full 100 W when required, with sufficient battery capacity for the trip and full redundancy across all radio gear, there was a fair amount of equipment to distribute between us.

## **Day 2 – first activation of the highest peak in Southern Africa**

### **Thabana Ntlenyana 7P/BB-001 (3482m)**

This would be an exciting day. I had always planned to operate from Thabana Ntlenyana, but only found out two weeks earlier that Sid and Adele Tyler had been working furiously with Simon and the SOTA team in the UK to get Lesotho registered as an association. The amount of work involved in a very limited time was staggering. So, not only would I be operating from the highest point in Africa south of Kilimanjaro, but as 7P/BB-001 this would be the highest SOTA activation on the continent to date. While I could find no records of previous HF operations the summit, I felt confident that if I got DX in the log, it would be a first.



I had budgeted for about 20 km of walking, with about 1,000 m of ascent and another 1,000 m of descent to “Camp 2”, a grassy, flattish area near a stream at the base of Nhlangezi Peak, KN-020. In

practice, we walked over 23 km because the guys preferred the longer, slightly less taxing approach along the SW ridge, where we could leave Pila with the heavy bags, instead of the steeper, more direct route from the SE, which would have involved all of us going over the summit.



On the hike in, we had a bit of a misunderstanding.

Sphamandla kept stopping for rest breaks, and I knew we had to keep our

pace up. I had horrible déjà vu – a year earlier on Champagne Castle KN-002, I was encouraged to take a porter (from another outfit) who turned out to be a lot less fit than I had hoped, and we were going way too slowly. I was forced to take gear back from him, which meant my pack weight topped 24 kg. Fortunately, Sphamandla thought he was stopping for my benefit, so we quickly got that ironed out – both guys were super-fit.



The drag up to the summit with Sphamandla was nontechnical and uneventful, passing the remnants of snow that only a week or two earlier had covered the whole escarpment plateau. After some obligatory photos on top, I found a spot about 4–5 m below the summit ridge that afforded protection from the wind. We

were running about an hour behind schedule, and I regretted not starting earlier.

It takes me about 12 minutes from getting my pack off to, “CQ SOTA, CQ SOTA, CQ Summits on the Air...”. This was to be the first use of my 7P8LZ call sign on the mountains, and the



remote Sandton team of Mark ZS6MDX, Keith ZS6Hi, and Graham ZS6GL, along with Christi ZS4CGR, did amazing work all week spotting me on local and DX channels. The guys had done their job, and the world was waiting.

The pile-up was immediate and unrelenting, with the time pressure on. SOTA chasers are by-and-large slick operators, but I did have one or two spelling out their names phonetically, giving me unnecessary grid references, or asking about my operating conditions. I called QRT at 100 contacts and after 59 DX. I was behind schedule and have learned to be disciplined and prioritise safety after previous mistakes – we still had 1,000 m of descent and 7 km to walk to get to where I wanted to pitch camp.



We got back to Pila and our bags, and covered the remaining distance quicker than expected, arriving at my GPS waypoint with enough light to get our tents up and cook dinner. With a rare lull in the wind, it was the balmiest of evenings. Although the river froze over during the night, I was plenty snug in my sleeping bag.

### **Day 3 – three never-activated 10-pointers?**



This was the most ambitious day of the project, with three peaks pencilled in and a long walk to our next campsite – we ended up covering almost 18 km. Fortunately, the first two peaks, Nhlangeni KN-020 and Ngaqamadolo KN-013, were the real SOTA prizes, and the third, minor peak, KN-027, would be a bit speculative.

I had encountered a potential legal/SOTA rules conflict three days previously while chatting on air with Sid ZS5AYC from our hut. Several of these peaks lie on the Lesotho/SA border but are registered with the ZS SOTA association. The “geographical” activation zone of 25 vertical metres extends into both countries, but the SOTA rules require you to operate from the side of the activation zone of the country the peak is registered with.

The problem arises if it is safer or advantageous to operate from the Lesotho side, while also being illegal to operate as ZS6LZ outside South Africa. Furthermore, some peaks will need to be re-registered as 7P, as the summits plainly lie in Lesotho. Once again, Sid came to the rescue and engaged the SOTA team in London, who relaxed the rule. This meant I could operate legally as 7P8LZ when inside Lesotho territory, even if the peak was ZS-registered.

## Nhlangeni KN-020

I was very excited about this peak. All my spinning of Google Earth in 3D had not revealed an obvious route through the rock bands, and we’d have to figure it out when we got up there. The summit ridge looked like a razor on the satellite pics, barely several metres wide, with a drop-off of thousands of feet on the

KZN side. Pila decided to accompany me while Sphamandla slept in.



We were off early and were quickly at the upper rock band. I could immediately see a way up that wasn't excessively technical, but certainly required a head for heights and careful movement over the rock, placing hands and feet very deliberately. The young man was a bit wide-eyed, and I left him sitting nervously, but safely, on a flat-ish rock with his feet dangling over KZN. After exploring the northern and highest part of the summit, I climbed through the notch and up onto the southern part, several metres lower but with better options for getting an antenna up – I had to shorten the guy lines for the pole because of the narrowness of the ridge.



It was still early, and the first contact was made immediately with Graham ZS6GL at 8:00. It was a Friday, so another great showing by our local operators. The only DX contact was with Chris F4WBN, chaserextraordinaire! In the interests of time and batteries, I realised that I was going to have to change protocol and limit contacts to one per operator per summit, and not work operators on multiple bands. It was very gratifying how well 40 m was working, getting all the way to ZS1 and the West Coast.



I was also very happy to contact Matt on 2 m, who by now had shifted base camp to KZN, way below us. I was able to ask him to relay a message on the multi-band contact

decision and some pile-up protocols, where I was encountering one or two challenges.

After 45 minutes and 47 contacts, I called QRT and was heading down by 09:00 to strike camp and set off for the next peak, KN-013.

## **Ngaqamadolo KN-013**

I had eyes on this brooding behemoth of a mountain since the summit of Thabana Ntlenyana, and it was plainly visible from Camp 2. Satellite pics beforehand hinted at what looked like a navigable gully through the rock band on the west side, but it was hard to say with certainty. I was able to confirm this when I got closer.



After a sustained slog, we left Pila with the packs on the ridge to the north, below the ramparts.

Sphamandla and I traversed southeast below the cliffs before working up the gully to

the summit. We were treated with spectacular views and lots of wind.

I set up just below the summit and hoped the band was being monitored, as I had



no cell signal, couldn't get Matt on 2 m, and Garmin InReach was glitching – ZS6GL responded immediately to my first call at 12:16.

The 10m band was open to Europe, and the US and Canada started trickling in. Under time pressure, I called it quits after 50 contacts, including 18 DX, as there was no time to dally; we had another peak to do and a long walk after that to Camp 3. A highlight was getting Sid ZS5AYC and Adele ZS5APT Summit-to-Summit (S2S) on KN-345.

My last QSO was at 13:15, and we were soon back down with Pila, where we donned our packs and set off down into the next



valley. The next peak, KN-027, was expected to be the easiest of the expedition, and the final one for the day. It was in plain sight and less than 2 km to the west – it would require only 160 m of vertical ascent to get to the top from the ridge-line separating

the mountains. Then, in less than a minute, clouds swept over the escarpment, entirely obliterating it from sight.

I don't like ascending a new mountain in low or no visibility – things can get confusing and dangerous quickly, even with modern nav aids. I have far fewer qualms descending in the dark or a white-out if I am backtracking my ascent. Given the time of day, I had severe misgivings about reaching Camp 3 in daylight



if we were to attempt the last activation. It was objectively a simple decision to make, but it irked me that 10-from-10 was now off the cards. The stars would have had to have aligned perfectly for that to happen, but I shifted my focus to the five peaks that still lay ahead.

By the time we set up camp, we had covered almost 18 km for the day, several kilometres further than expected. It was a stun-

ning site to pitch tents in the vast, empty grasslands at nearly 3,000 m in altitude, totally devoid of any signs of people, and with clouds pouring over the escarpment.

## Day 4 – hard lessons and guardian angels

On the cards for the day were two peaks, Redi KN-050 and The Tent KN-016, with an expected distance of about 16km and 800m of ascent and descent.

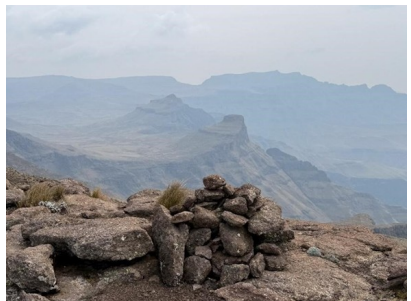


The wind had picked up overnight, and it had started to rain before first light. The icy rain was driven horizontally as we struck camp and did our best to keep our gear dry. I had previously sworn

that I would never hike with anyone without checking their gear first, but failed to do so this time. It was bitterly cold, and Pila had forgotten his rain jacket and was shaking uncontrollably – a very serious mistake, as hypothermia comes quickly in these conditions. Fortunately, I had brought a military-style poncho to cover me and my pack and was able to give this to him in return for his pack cover. Without this, we would have had to re-pitch tents and sit the weather out, destroying our schedule.

### Redi KN-050 (3309m)

The weather remained unstable and unpredictable, with lulls in the rain followed by sudden showers. The hike up to Redi involved an ascent of about 500 m. It's on the route to Giant's Castle, so we hiked to the summit with full packs. On top, the



view was spectacular – Giant’s Castle in the distance had steadily been getting bigger over the last several days and now, only 10 km away as the crow flies, its hulking presence dominated the skyline.

The wind on top was horrendous, and you had to watch your footing carefully with big packs and sudden gusts. It was too strong to get the antenna up on the exposed part of the summit, but I was confident enough by now that I’d find some shelter in the lee within



the activation zone. At this stage, it was only about finding a gap in the weather to get the minimum four contacts and log the first activation. I could see that the guys just wanted to get this day done and into their tents with some hot food in their tummies.



Having set such low expectations of the radio work, it was almost inevitable that they would be exceeded. In the brief lull afforded to me before a fresh shower swept in, 25 contacts were made, including the indefatigable Chris F4WBN on the French west coast, and

Hatori JH1MXV, north of Tokyo. When I was making my exchange with Japan, I unplugged my headphones and called Pila over to listen in. He confessed, “Boss, I thought you were lying to me about all of this (DX) because it can’t be true, but now I see you didn’t lie, it is like magic...” Further highlights included summits-to-summit with Graham ZS6GL and Robert S2S

on Jagfontein GP-019, and Sid ZS5AYC and Adele on Matatiele EC-106.



We packed up just before 11:00 in the rain, which stopped before we set off on the long descent into the valley and to the base of KN-016. At that stage, the odds of that ascent were not looking great, particularly as I wasn't 100% sure how to get up to the summit.

## The Tent KN-016 (Episode 1)



No matter how many times I studied the satellite views in the planning phase, I could not positively confirm a clear break in the rock, although the north side of the pyramid shape seemed significantly more promising than the others, with much shallower rock bands. Google

Earth's 3D interpolation algorithms often get confused with cliffs less than 10 m, often just blending them into the slopes above and below. The walk-in yielded some dramatic views, with shafts of bright sunlight occasionally punching through the glowering overcast. I hadn't taken off my weatherproof gear all day and knew things would need to improve before I could safely risk an attempt.

Once in the valley, we encountered domestic animals for the first time, and later a shepherd ambled through our camp. I had-

n't filtered or chlorinated water up to this point but decided it would now be sensible. The cliffs on the SE were clearly impenetrable without climbing gear and a partner, and on the SW side there was a sheer drop-off thousands of feet into KZN. Once we rounded the western side, I could see the more likely northern aspect of the mountain.

We put up tents after 13:00, and I managed to get a message to Mark ZS6MDX via Garmin InReach, a glitchy satellite messaging service, that the activation was on hold for now, which he relayed. We sat out a few showers, had a bite to eat, and waited. By 14:30, the weather seemed better. I woke the guys and said I was ready to go, but both looked very dubiously at the cliffs from inside their tents and neither budged, which I was ok with. I gave them an HT and said I'd only call if I had a problem, to let them know I was on top and again on my way down.



When either of the guys accompanied me on previous activations, I always did meticulous gear checks to ensure that nothing had been left behind. I was under more pressure because of the unstable weather and perhaps also a bit

blasé going solo, because the routine was so well established. Either way, my attention was more on the mountain than my radio.

I was in a hurry and was breathing hard when I got to the base of the first band. After an assessment, I could see a viable route

that would involve supplementing the handholds with some tufts of rugged berg grass.

Once through the band, I messaged Mark and my wife, Inge, via InReach to alert the cavalry. It is much harder to navigate big terrain features at ground level than from satellite pics, and wending your way through rock terraces is made significantly easier if you have created a GPS track to follow. I was on the summit soon after that, soaking up the stupendous views into KZN, thousands of metres below.



With the mast and antenna up, and coax and battery connected, all I needed to do was plug in my headset. The bag wasn't there, and no amount of searching was going to spawn it into existence. No issue – that's why we build in redundancy, just grab the mic and use the radio speaker. In my hurried rearrangement at camp, I had placed the mic in the headphone bag. To find yourself on top of a never-activated berg peak, with a limited weather window and a tight schedule to maintain, with chasers waiting, and out of ideas...

To be frank, I was quite philosophical about this turn of events. I have experienced how difficult it is to be sensible and call QRT when you are in the middle of a DX pile-up. At



15:30, it was late to be starting an activation on a mountain with a tricky descent, potentially in the rain, at altitude, and with failing light. I would just have to come back and do it in the morning, but something would need to be bumped from the schedule. Fortunately, Alan ZR6AQV had inadvertently made that decision easier for me by doing the first activation of Durnford KN-007 earlier in July - getting the first activation of The Tent had priority.

As it happens, I had to search for a good ten minutes to find the stone marker I had placed for myself at the top of the descent through the lower rock band, which was the only viable place to get down. Routes that are visible when standing back and looking upwards are often not visible when standing at the top and looking down. I realised that if there was ever a day to leave a key item behind, the universe conspired to look after me that



day. Later in the afternoon, the weather improved and I set up the antenna outside the tent and had several very pleasant chats as 7P8LZ/P, which made a nice change from working pile-ups.

## Day 5 – Going for eight with two to go

This day originally had Giant's Castle KN-004 in with Durnford KN-007. The plan was adjusted to an early activation of The Tent KN-016, strike camp, and get to Giant's Castle as quickly

as possible, as the weather was forecast to remain unstable. We would then aim to pitch camp somewhere near the top of the pass for an early descent the next morning.

## The Tent KN-016 (Episode 2)



With the route now familiar, I was up quickly and was on the summit before 8:00. The weather was benign and, with the exertion of climbing, I was in a shirt for the summit pic despite the temperature. The activation was quick, with 34 contacts made in 40 minutes. Most notable was a contact made on 20m with FR/F1TEQ, holidaying in Réunion with a wire dangling outside his hotel window. Given the time of day, it was remarkable to get such solid 10m contacts with SOTA and POTA stalwarts Chris F4WBN, Larry F5PYI, Vrata OK1KT and Jan OK2PDT. Summit to summit is the caviar SOTA, and it was a joy to get Sid and Adele EC-261.



## Giant's Castle KN-004

Giant's Castle is one of the Drakensberg's iconic peaks and dominates the skyline of the southern part of the Central Drakensberg – it is also the third-highest SOTA peak in South Africa and was yet to receive its first activation. We struck camp quickly at the base of The Tent and got walking, with a lot of cloud and the ever-present risk of rain.

We got to the top of Giant's Castle Pass just after 12:30, and the weather was clearly deteriorating. We had made good time, and I was feeling strong and keen to ascend without delay. I truly enjoyed working with my porters. They were strong, keen, and easy to get on with, notwithstanding communication difficulties – I'd use them again if the need arises. On this day, though, I was a little irritated, but it was largely a messaging issue. I had done the morning's activation solo, giving them time to eat a proper breakfast, meaning all we ought to have needed was a snack.

The wind had picked up, and they immediately found a sheltered spot to get their stove going and have a hot lunch, while I was feeling the time pressure. I said I was going to start up the mountain, and Sphamandla said he'd follow shortly – he did eventually get up, but only after I was already on top with all the gear.



I hadn't spent enough time carefully studying my map and GPS route, and had underestimated the time it would take to get to the summit. When I hit the escarpment ridgeline, I contacted Matt at Giant's Castle Camp on 2 m – we were line of sight for the first time in days. Happy to hear his voice, it seemed surreal that, according to the GPS, he was in semi-civilisation only 10 km distant and 1,500 m below me. I asked him about the weather down there, because I could see showers all over KZN to the north and east, and the weather system I had been warned about closing in from the west over Lesotho.

My first contacts were with Christie ZS4CGR and his wife Marie ZS4MG just before 14:00. I was working as quickly as I could as I stared at the weather rolling in and the wind whipping the mast and antenna wire. I got 29 domestic contacts in the log inside 20 minutes, including summits-to-summit with Sid and Adele on KN-204, and Peet ZS3PL, his wife Esmarie ZS3EL, and son Petrus ZU3PL, on NC-068. I then switched to 10 m and worked 10 DX stations before calling it, including Leszek SQ9MDF on OM/



ZA0190, a summit in the Malá Fatra mountains of Slovakia. With more guys calling and thunder clapping in the distance, the priority was now to get off this mountain – it was a long way down to Pila and our bags, and we hadn't yet identified where we were going to be able to get tents up.

While Sphamandla wasn't much help getting the gear to the top, I was very grateful to have him on the way down – we literally sprinted off that mountain. By the time we got to Pila at the top of the pass, the rain had started in earnest, and we doubted our

ability to walk the couple of kilometres to a more sheltered site. We did the best we could and made use of a flattish spot near the top of the pass. Getting tents up in that wind was a huge challenge, and I oriented mine with the back facing the prevailing wind. What I didn't realise was that the wind direction was about to change, and that was going to cause problems – I was in for a very unpleasant night indeed.



The afternoon wind was too strong to get a stove going, even in the shelter of the vestibule of the tent, so I sat out the rest of the afternoon, snacking on nuts, fruit, and chocolate. As darkness fell, I heard the roar of the wind against the opposite mass of Giant's Castle, tearing at the mountain. Then

the roar died down, to be replaced by a dead stillness; then slowly a rising, more terrifying, visceral sound from far below in the pass – it was like an otherworldly, primordial beast screaming up the narrow gully, before exploding into our camp, ripping violently at the tent and almost blowing it flat.

The wind had changed direction, and our tents were broadside to it. With the rock towering over us to both the left and right, we were in the very throat of the pass, and the wind blowing against the escarpment was funnelling through the narrow gap. I was

lamenting the fact that we didn't have enough time earlier to get our tents up in a better spot ahead of the weather. The wind was unrelenting all night. While our tents are designed to take a hammering, I fully expected them to fail at any moment. It is truly remarkable that they did not.

## Day 6 – the descent and a memorable evening!



No-one had slept a wink, and we were keen to get down as quickly as possible and stuck into some civilised comforts. The top of the pass is steep and requires a little care. As the slope eased further down, we picked up the pace. The

strength of the wind is hard to describe – Pila was walking in front of me and seemed like he was leaning 20 degrees to the side to keep his balance.

On the way down, we were able to look up at where I had activated Giant's Castle the previous day, but from the opposite side.



To the north, we were rewarded with some magnificent views of the Drakensberg range too. We covered the roughly

1,100 m descent and 13 km of the pass in well under four hours, which was good going. I had Matt on 2 m for the last several kilometres and was very anxious for him to confirm that there would be cold beer on hand the moment we stepped into camp. Matt, of course, was exceptionally well prepared, and it was great to see him after so many days of communicating mostly via HF.



It was time to say goodbye and give thanks to Sphamandla and Pila for their efforts. Matt and I then packed the Toyota and departed Giant's Castle Camp, which is a beautiful place with spectacular views, and where Matt had spent the previous evening in a nice chalet, and from where he was communicating with me on top. Our final night was to be spent at Little Switzerland, halfway up Oliviershoek Pass. The drive there along the back roads was very scenic, and it was a great opportunity to share our stories and experiences that had been running in parallel, with neither of us having a visual sense of what the other was up to.

Little Switzerland is a bit of a tradition for me, as I have celebrated several epic adventures there over the last several decades – and this was to be no exception. We went straight to the pub, with me still in my undershirt, and ordered a cold beer, followed by one or two other beverages. The barman made a concession and allowed us to have dinner in the pub – an awesome rump steak. It is possible we rounded it all off with a cognac before finally heading off to sleep.



## In summary

For me, this expedition was a wonderful and deeply satisfying experience, where my personal objectives were achieved. The effort put into the conceptualisation and planning phase bore fruit in the wide, open spaces of the summit plateau and on the peaks along the escarpment edge. It turned out to be an epic SOTA trip. Eight out of a maximum of ten peaks is an outcome I am extremely happy with – ten would have required perfect

weather and no setbacks of any kind. For the SOTA-minded, that was 104 points from the 10-point peaks with winter bonuses, including six first activations.



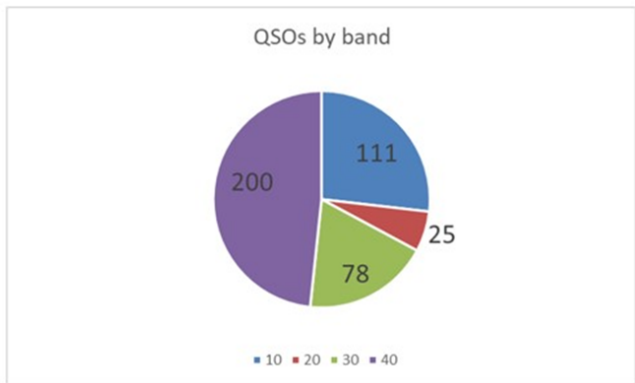
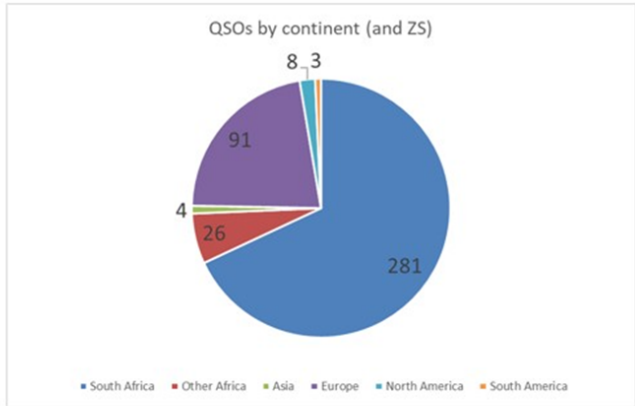
The physical effort required a fraction under 100 km of walking and approximately 5,000 m of ascent, the equivalent of gaining the height between Durban and Johannesburg more than three times over. Between me and the porters, all the gear and supplies were carried from the second day without external support or human infrastructure, but at no point did I feel the team was over-taxed.

From a radio perspective, and that of a “micro-DXpedition”, 413 contacts were made, including 112 DX across 34 DXCC entities. Especially gratifying were the 59 DX contacts as 7P8LZ from the summit of Thabana Ntlenyana. I was very happy with the DX component,

given the limitations on opportunity. I prioritised local chasers on 40 m, 30 m, and 20 m before targeting DX on 10 m,

which was cut short on four occasions: on ZKN-010 due to battery limits, on 7P/BB-001 and ZS-013 due to time and schedule constraints (cut at 100 and 50 contacts respectively), and on KN-004 due to weather conditions. It was always a question of balancing contacts with time, weather, and safety.

	Count
1 South Africa	321
2 Namibia	14
3 France	14
4 Germany	12
5 Italy	10
6 Czech Republic	10
7 Russia	9
8 United States	6
9 Lesotho	5
10 Slovenia	5
11 Spain	5
12 England	4
13 Belgium	3
14 Canary Islands	3
15 Slovak Republic	3
16 Sweden	3
17 Argentina	3
18 Asiatic Turkey	2
19 Canada	2
20 Reunion Island	2
21 Ukraine	2
22 Austria	1
23 Balearic Islands	1
24 Denmark	1
25 European Russia	1
26 Greece	1
27 Japan	1
28 Northern Ireland	1
29 Poland	1
30 Rwanda	1
31 Scotland	1
32 Switzerland	1
33 Wales	1
34 Angola	1



Some may wonder why 20 m represented only 6% of the contacts, relative to 27% on 10 m. The reasons are twofold:

First, I chose a 6 m pole (approximately 5 m with bend), not only for weight and size purposes, but because it is optimised at 0.5λ for the 10 m band. Regional contacts I can cover exhaustively on the other bands. However, the pole is too low on 20 m to re-

ally achieve the take-off angle required for DX, where a bigger and heavier 10 m pole would be ideal.

Second, I progress through the bands sequentially from 40 m through to 10 m for reasons I have established work best. Therefore, if I made a contact with an operator on 40 m, I wouldn't make another on 30 m; if I got them on 30 m, I wouldn't do 20 m.

Some may also wonder why the Americas represent only 10% of the DX component, with so many active SOTA chasers there. The answer is simply time of day. Many of the activations were early morning, before operators are up and about and band conditions fully open. US contacts increase steadily later in the day.

## **Gratitude**

What I valued most was the professional teamwork across multiple functions: Matt ZS6MDV for providing base camp support; the porters, Sphamandla and Pila, for their assistance on the mountains; Graham ZS6GL, Mark ZS6MDX, Christie ZS4CGR, and Keith ZS6Hi for handling the alerts and spots; and my safety group.

Especial thanks to Sid ZS5AYC and Adele ZS5APT for their encouragement and, along with Simon G4TJC, for their herculean effort in getting Lesotho registered as an association before this trip. Also, for their efforts in extending the SOTA Spring Weekend for a further week to allow for the additional S2S contacts.

Thanks to the whole global SOTA chaser community for their dedication to the programme and their superb operating skills, as well as all the other operators who gave me contacts. Thank you to Bienno Power for their sponsorship of the batteries used on this expedition. Finally, thanks to my wife, Inge, for supporting my adventures.

**Brandon ZS6LZ / 7P8LZ**

# LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

## *Thoughts on planning, alignment and marginal gains in Field Day*

Brandon Zietsman ZS6LZ – Sandton Amateur Radio Club

Submitted for publication by Vaughan ZS2VR

I used to do a fair amount of offshore kayak fishing, paddling with a well-known guide called Markus Potgieter on the KZN North Coast and in Mozambique. He was exceptional at his craft, and there were deep lessons in watching him fish. I “did” everything he did – used the same lures and bait, paddled alongside him, fished the same waters and depths – yet while Markus regularly filled his kayak with couta and yellowfin tuna, the rest of us often returned empty-handed.

There was no single secret sauce and no silver bullet. The difference lay in many small things done consistently well, combined with an intuition developed through careful observation, which allowed him to integrate those parts into a coherent strategy. Some were sceptical that such apparently insignificant details could matter. Yet those marginal differences compounded, and the results were undeniable.

### Start with the big picture

The request for submissions for these Field Day articles invited contributors to share not only *what* they do, but more specifically *how* they do it. In this article, I’d like to approach that slightly differently and suggest that the *what* and the *how* flow first from the *why*. It is far easier to add colour and detail when the outlines are clear.

There are sayings in both Afrikaans and English that convey the same idea: “*Hoe meer haas hoe minder spoed*”, and “*go slow to*

*go fast*". In essence, it is worth spending more time on the big picture before plunging down rabbit holes. If you start with the detail, strategic purpose can easily become a somewhat random outcome of disconnected micro-initiatives.

Most people tend to ignore this "fuzzy stuff" – in radio contests, as in business and sport. Those who consistently develop an edge usually don't. It's easy to dive straight in, see meaningful improvements for a while, and then plateau – often at a level that still falls short of what might be possible. That is usually the point at which the problem needs to be approached differently, which may involve taking a few steps backwards before moving forwards.

In amateur radio this tendency is particularly strong and nowhere is the temptation greater to immerse oneself in gear and gadgets – we hams are among the most gadget-oriented people you'll meet. Eyes often light up when you talk about radios and antennas, but glaze over when the discussion turns to purpose and strategy. Practical people enjoy *doing*, but doing *better* often requires pausing and thinking first.

What do you want to achieve?

You can't plan meaningfully unless you have a sense of mission. The starting questions are simple, but important: who makes up the team, and what do we want to achieve? Why do we want to achieve it? How will we know whether we've succeeded, and how will we reach agreement on that? Who will take the lead and initiative – formally or informally – and are others comfortable with that? What resources, experience, and specialist skills are available, and who is prepared to take accountability for what?

A relaxed weekend with a braai and a beer, with some radio thrown in, is a perfectly legitimate objective. So is a group of in-

dividuals using Field Day as an opportunity to experiment with their own radios and antennas. But even these relaxed goals can be undermined if people have different expectations of what the weekend is meant to be. If the aim is to move further up the log or beat a previous best score, then the challenge needs to be met more systematically.

The key is alignment. Pulling in different directions creates tension and diminishes the experience for everyone. If a Field Day win is the objective, then it helps to think of the team as a single organism with specialist functions, rather than a loose coalition of individuals with various skills.

The middle bits – focus on understanding

Understand the rules

The rules of any game matter. Understanding choices and trade-offs is essential. It is possible to lose many small battles and still win the war – and also to win many battles and still lose. Ideally, of course, you want enough margin that a few missed opportunities don't undo the whole effort.

A good grasp of the rules and scoring helps you decide where to focus, what to prioritise, how to allocate limited resources, and which trade-offs are unavoidable.

Baseload contacts and multipliers

Scores are a function of both QSOs and multipliers. Multiply zero by anything and the result is still zero – you need a critical baseload of contacts first. If you achieve 20% more QSOs than your competitors but miss a key multiplier, you can quickly find yourself back at breakeven. Multipliers only matter if there is a solid base for them to operate on.

Marginal differences, not absolute value

Not all contacts are equal, because they carry different points – but that information is of limited value. A better insight is that not all points are “equal”, even if they count the same. A high-points contact that every major rival also works may be less valuable, competitively, than a low-points contact that few or no other competitors manage to log. What often matters most is not the absolute value of a contact, but the *difference* it creates relative to others at the margin.

## **Deliberate targeting**

Simply calling “CQ contest” and hoping for contacts is rarely a strategy. It helps to be clear about who you are trying to work and where they are relative to you. If you place your Field Day site on a map and draw concentric rings around it, who lies within NVIS range? And beyond NVIS range - and beyond that? Which bands will we reach them on, with what radiation patterns, and can some stations be worked on multiple bands to increase their value?

The question becomes: what combination of choices best serves the mission?

End with establishing edge cases and sweating the detail

Some people are sceptical about sweating the detail in Field Day operations – terrain, slope, ground conditions, antenna placement and orientation. Edge cases seldom explain the real world perfectly, but they are useful precisely because they are easy to dismiss. If one extreme is assuming textbook diagrams perfectly predict real-world propagation, that is clearly flawed. But it is equally unrealistic to assume that established theory offers no useful guidance at all.

If the truth lies somewhere in between, and if marginal gains compound, then it makes sense to explore every possible advantage. My own experience – whether in SOTA, POTA, or

Field Day contests – suggests that these considerations work well enough, and often enough, to make a consistent difference.

All else being equal, rocky ground will not outperform deeper soils for NVIS; an upslope will not favour shallow take-off angles for DX as much as a gentle downslope; cluttered terrain rarely beats open ground; and a dipole at  $0.75\lambda$  on 10 m will not send less RF straight up into space than one at  $0.5\lambda$ . We have all made excellent contacts off the ends of dipoles that theory would call nulls, but getting orientation right still matters. If you cannot instinctively point to north – or Paris or New York – when erecting an antenna, no amount of gadgetry will fully compensate.

## In summary

In a 100 m sprint, results are measured only by the time taken to cross the line, not by how well you did with so little training, but the 100 m sprint is not the only game in town. Minimising the schlepp *and* doing reasonably well is a perfectly valid objective – it just shouldn't be confused with trying to win the race outright. No one has the right to dictate your goals or how you define success. That is why it is worth starting with *why* – what you want to get out of Field Day, as a team and as individuals – before diving headlong into the *how*.

### Disclaimer

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# Birthdays and Anniversaries

## Birthdays

### January 2026

23 Paul Schoeman ZS2PS  
26 Ulrich Ann ZR2A

### February 2026

02 Paul Galpin ZS2PG  
02 Dirk Swart ZS2JD  
04 Shawn Gilbert ZS2SG  
04 Ivan Newman ZS2ILN  
06 Ettiene Lotter ZS2LE  
07 Andre Nortje ZS2ALN  
11 Nicole Mitchell ZS2NEM  
11 Clinton Schram ZS2CS  
14 Amy Foster Amy  
14 Arno du Preez ZS2ABT  
17 Jeffrey Ferreira ZR2JEF

## Spouse Birthdays

### January 2026

24 Suzette Greyling Bennie ZR2BC

### February 2026

02 Ginny Pullinger ZS2GIN Pat ZS2PJP  
03 Wanda van Vuuren Johan ZS2JV  
06 Neels Kruger Patricia (Patsy) ZS2PTY  
07 Joan Bowles ZR2ABA Allan ZS2BO  
08 Tracey Hartwig ZS2TAH Trevor ZS2TJ  
09 Ronel Styles Robbie ZS2RF  
12 Jackie Norton Rory ZS2BL

## Anniversaries

### January 2026

19 Tejas Dixeeta Gajjar ZS2TG  
22 Andre Renett van Deventer ZS2BK

### February 2026

01 Nico Lizette Oelofse ZS4N  
08 Jan Sonya Swart ZS2JS  
15 Christopher Vanessa Scarr ZS2AAW  
ZS2VS

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**YOU** can become a member of PEARS - you do not have to be a radio amateur, nor do you have to be in the PE Area. We would like to have you as a member, and to include you in the QSX mailing list. Send us your details or [download a PEARS Mermbership Application form](#), fill it in and email it back to us on [committee\[at\]peham.co.za](mailto:committee[at]peham.co.za)

The society membership subscriptions are renewable at the beginning of April each year. The rates are:

Standard : R300.00  
Pensioner : R150.00  
Spouse of a member : R50.00  
Student/scholar : R80.00

*(rates updated after the 2024 AGM)*

its into the club bank account can be made but members must use their callsign or name as a reference for identification purposes on the bank statement.

Club bank details:

**NEDBANK SAVINGS ACCOUNT NO. 2212527594**  
**BRANCH CODE 198765 (NEDBANK SOUTH AFRICA)**

## Sunday SARL and Monday Evening PEARS Bulletins

PEARS provides a local reading of the SARL bulletin every Sunday morning at 8:15 in Afrikaans read by Kevern ZR2BK and at 8:30 in English read by Rory ZS2BL, transmitted through the Lady's Slipper Repeater on 145.700MHz.

PEARS Bulletins are transmitted on Monday evenings at 20H00 through the Lady's Slipper repeater 145.700MHz 88.5Hz Narrow, which is coupled to the Longmore Repeater 145.625 MHz 88.5Hz Narrow.

## Bulletin Roster

26-Jan	Ashley	ZS2AG
02-Feb	Vaughan	ZS2VR
09-Feb	Patsy	ZS2PTY
16-Feb	Andrew	ZS2AFB
23-Feb	Rory	ZS2BL
02-Mar	Kevern	ZR2BK
09-Mar	Dave	ZS2DH
16-Mar	Chris	ZS2AAW
23-Mar	Mike	ZS2MIC

<http://www.zs2pe.co.za/bulletins.html>

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Vice Chairman, SARL liaison, Hammies, Youth, Contest Scoring	Dave Higgs	ZS2DH	om[at]zs2dh.co.za	082 387 5657
Treasurer	Michael Steenkamp	ZS2MIC	zs2mic[at]igen.co.za	082 523 5677
Secretary, Repeaters, QSX emailing, club database	Christopher Scarr	ZS2AAW	christopher[at]peham.co.za	082 925 6367
RAE Training	Vaughan Rizzo	ZS2VR	vaughan[at]netaddress.co.za	082 882 6555
Technical/repeaters, Search and Rescue & Emergency comms	Glen Cummings	ZS2GV	glenvanessa[at]gmail.com	082 411 2743
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Public relations, special events	Patsy Kruger	ZS2PTY	patsykruger68[at]cloud.com	082 513 9493
Fox hunts, Field Days	Andrew Bouwer	ZS2AFB	andrew[at]bouwer.cc	072 546 7836

### CO-OPTED POSTS

PORTFOLIO	NAME	CALLSIGN	EMAIL	CONTACT No
Contest Liaison Officer	Theunis Potgieter	ZS2EC	zs2ec01[at]gmail.com	064 901 8079
Events & Rally organising	Tony Allen	ZR2TX	tony.zr2tx[at]gmail.com	082 956 2920
RAE Training	Shaun Gilbert	ZS2SG	gaswise3[at]gmail.com	083 672 5241

(Please note: The "@" sign has been replaced with "[at]" in the above addresses to try to prevent spamming)

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**Local Repeaters: These repeaters form a separate sub-net in the PE - Uitenhage - Despatch area.**

Town VHF	Longmore	Uitenhage	Town UHF	<---- IRLP available on this subnet
145.050/650 88.5Hz, Narrow 12.5k	145.025/625 88.5Hz, Narrow 12.5k	145.075/675 Wide 25k	431.050/438.650 Wide 25k	
<b>Cockscomb</b> 431.000/438,600 Add 88.5Hz for squ tail	<b>Viewlands</b> 431.075/438.675 Add 88.5Hz for squ tail	<---- These form linking hubs for events, hence no tail	<b>DMR</b> 430.675/438.275 QTH: ZS2VA	<b>D-Star</b> 145.175/775 QTH: ZS2N

**Cape Linked System Repeaters:**

These form the PEARS long-range 2-metre repeater system, in conjunction with the Border, Southern Cape and WCRWG systems. See [www.zs2pe.co.za/Repeaters/repeaters.htm](http://www.zs2pe.co.za/Repeaters/repeaters.htm) for more details.

Lady's Slipper	Grahamstown	Cradock	Noupoort (link only)
145,100/700 88.5Hz, Narrow 12.5k	145,150/750 Wide 25k	145,050/650 Wide 25k	438,750 / 438,675 Wide 25k
Colesberg 431,075/438,675 Wide 25k	Kareedouw 145,125/725	Plett 145,175/775	Brenton 145,075/675

**APRS/Packet network:**

ZSONTP Node	ZS0KDK APRS Digi	ZS0KDB APRS Digi
Lady's Slipper 434,800 1200bd 439.850 9600 bd	Mount Road 434,800 1200bd	Longmore 434,800 1200bd

VHF Beacon: 50,007 MHz FSK – ZS2X, 25 Watts into 2 element Yagi beaming north.

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