

Where in the World is . . .
Baker Island (KH1)
CQ Zone 31 ITU Zone 61 IOTA OC-089
by Ron Litt, K5HM

Approaching from a distance the island, barely 26 feet above sea level resembled the back of some fabled sea monster of 15th century sea tales. Covered with low lying scrub vegetation, Baker Island is less than a mile wide and slightly more than a mile long. Its population of seabirds makes their presence known on anything that offers a perch.

Its terrain is sandy. Along with its neighbor only 42 miles NNW, Howland Island they form the Baker Island National Wildlife Refuge. Not exactly your favorite bird watching spot, the islands lie almost halfway between Hawaii and Australia.

Barely north of the Equator and east of the International Dateline, by this odd quirk of geography, they are last pieces of U.S. territory that experience the new day.



Baker was discovered in the early 19th century by whaling ships that crossed the Pacific. The island is named for Capt. Michael Baker of the whaler *Gideon Howland*, who visited the island several times between 1832 and 1839; once to bury one of his crew. Captain Baker claimed the island for the United States in 1855, then he sold his interest to a group who later formed the American Guano Company.



One of the most peculiar pieces of legislation to come out of the Congress in 1856, the Guano Islands Act enabled citizens of the U.S. to take possession of unclaimed islands that contained guano deposits. At the time guano, particularly seabird guano was highly prized as a potent fertilizer and later as a feedstock in the manufacture of gunpowder. Hence bird doo-doo, for a brief period became a strategically important material.

So much so that when the American Guano Company sold its mining rights to a British firm in 1886, the UK government considered the U.S. to have abandoned their claim to the island and claimed it a British Territory. Although they never formally annexed it, the British and Americans exchanged notes and nasty phone calls until 1935 when the Americans decided to settle the matter by announcing their intentions to colonize the two islands.

The American Equatorial Islands Colonization Project did not last long. A total of 130 colonists, comprised of Hawaiian islanders and military personnel were delivered to both Howland and Baker islands aboard the Coast Guard Cutter *Itasca*, in 1935. They built a lighthouse and dwellings. Their efforts at agriculture were ineffective as the island had little rainfall and no natural springs. The dry climate and seabirds, eager for anything upon which to perch, did not give the trees or shrubs much of a chance. The remainder of the civilian population were evacuated in 1942 after [Japanese](#) air and naval attacks. During [World War](#) Baker was occupied by the U.S. military.

One of the greatest puzzles of the modern world took place near Baker in 1937. Famous aviatrix, Amelia Earhart was attempting to complete a round the world flight. Her plane disappeared somewhere near neighboring Howland Island as she was searching for the island's air strip to refuel. Her plane disappeared without a trace and today the mystery is still unsolved.

The 2018 Baker Island Dxpedition commemorates the 81st anniversary of Amelia Earhart's disappearance on July 2, 1937 near Baker & Howland islands -- as well as the commitment and sacrifices made by the Hui

Panalā'au -- a group of brave young men from Hawaii who attempted the colonization of Baker and Howland from 1935-1942.



Operating under a permit from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, fourteen amateurs landed on Baker from June 26th to July 7th. During that time, the team racked up 68,981 contacts worldwide. Baker Island is ranked as the 5th most wanted DX location, according to Clublog's most Wanted List.

Environmental considerations required the team to utilize vertical antennas exclusively. They opted for Steppir verticals and eight Elecraft K3s and Amplifiers. For software, the team reied on the win4k3suite and N1MM for logging.

The photo at left shows the on-island team from the deck of their support ship. They are smiling because they are leaving Baker, where the temperatures over 100 by 10AM and heading for a cold shower.

Reporting from the Dark Side,
Ron Litt, K5HM