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GIS AND GPS AT THE APRIL MEETING

Colin von B will be sunning himself on the East Coast, so Paul Turvey has arranged to bring forward the presentation on "Geographic Information Systems [GIS] and Global Positioning Systems [GPS] for Beginners". The presenter will be Adrian O'Donnell, a teacher from Latrobe High School who is travelling down especially for our meeting. Adrian has been highly successful in introducing students to the potential of Geographic Information Systems in and out of the classroom. Adrian will take us through an introduction to GIS showing how to acquire software and datasets, and how students have used these tools to solve real world spatial system problems.

What is GIS? One definition: "A system of hardware, software, and procedures designed to support the capture, management, manipulation, analysis, modeling and display of spatially-referenced data for solving complex planning and management problems." (NCGIA lecture by David Cowen, 1989) Follow that? No, neither did I. But I am sure Adrian can explain it so that we will.

And what is GPS? The Global Positioning System (GPS) is a worldwide radio-navigation system formed from a constellation of 24 satellites and their ground stations. GPS uses these "man-made stars" as reference points to calculate positions accurate to a matter of meters. In fact, with advanced forms of GPS you can make measurements to better than a centimeter! In a sense it's like giving every square meter on the planet a unique address. GPS receivers have been miniaturized to just a few integrated circuits and so are becoming very economical. And that makes the technology accessible to virtually everyone. These days GPS is finding its way into cars, boats, planes, construction equipment, movie making gear, farm machinery, even laptop computers. Soon GPS will become almost as basic as the telephone.

While these are complex technologies, they are now finding their way into everyday life. Come and hear Adrian explain them in terms you will be able to understand. As a once off, Paul Turvey proposes to host this meeting at the Hands On Energy Discovery Centre, 1st Floor, 4 Elizabeth Street, Hobart. If you have a problem with that change of venue, please advise Paul (pt@southcom.com.au) as soon as possible.

WORM WRITERS' COMPETITION

From vnunet.com:

Virus writers stage online slanging match

Iain Thomson , 03-03-2004

The authors of the MyDoom, Bagel and Netsky worms are staging a public slanging match - with the world's PCs as their arena.

The war started when an early version of Netsky, referred to as either C or D, began removing the Bagel and MyDoom viruses as part of its payload. And now the authors of MyDoom.G, spreading today, have included comments in the worm's code insulting Netsky.

A similar message was found in Bagel J, also discovered today, which ended: "Don't ruine our bussiness, wanna start a war?" Netsky's authors responded with the following message in Netsky.F: "Skynet AntiVirus - Bagle - you are a loser!!!"

"We have three different groups fighting here," said Mikko Hypponen, director of antivirus research for F-Secure. "Netsky seems to come from an individual or hobbyist group while Bagel's creators appear to be a spam group like MyDoom's authors. We don't know who's going to win but in the meantime the rest of us are all losing."

The battle continues to hot up, with more than one new variant of all three viruses being identified today.

If this battle continues, we can expect many more variants of these, and probably other, worms.

Also from Iain Thompson at vnunet.com, dated 1 March 2004:

The flood of variants of the Bagel and Netsky viruses shows that more and more people are learning more about viruses and how to tweak them.

Netsky.D and Bagel.G have been discovered today, and the rate of new variants shows no sign of slowing. Netsky.D spreads via email as an executable attachment only. It scans both the local PC and network drives for email addresses to send itself too. Tomorrow, any computer infected by the worm will beep constantly from the PC's speaker from 06:00 to 08:59.

Bagel.G is more of a social engineering attack, with the infected email using a wide variety of headers and messages to convince the user to open its Trojan payload.

Some experts blame the rush of virus variants on the increasing number of relatively inexperienced computer users who are using automated virus creation kits. "There are so many more people out there who can tweak the code and release a new variant these days," said Jack Clark, technical consultant for McAfee. "Unfortunately they're succeeding because people are still making the same mistakes, like opening unidentified attachments. In the last months we've seen evidence of antivirus software being studied by malware writers to understand how heuristics engines work."

One such example is virus writers hiding malware within password-protected Zip files, which are generally not scanned by antivirus software. "A password-protected file is essentially encrypted so they can't be scanned by some of the other antivirus packages," said David Emm, product marketing manager for Network Associates.

"It's difficult to say if we're seeing a growth in the number of virus writers, but some of the techniques being used are effective - chiefly the mass mailing of infected mails. "Making icons look familiar by portraying them as a standard folder or spreadsheet is also making them more effective."

It all comes down to educating users how to treat attachments to email, especially executable ones. As one writer put it:

Antivirus companies want you to believe that you should be able to receive anything from anyone, and a great many techies in the world really believe it. It is this fallacy that is causing most of the havoc.

About 99 per cent of all normal communications - documents, graphics, sounds or text - do not contain any executable code. If you want a piece of executable code, you invariably know that you want it, and from whom.

By applying a simple rule of only accepting executable code from people you know and that you have requested or are expecting, you can stop over 98 per cent of all viruses with no traditional antivirus software at all.

That may be true for reasonably experienced users, but would a novice know what is executable code and what isn't? As far as attachments go, executable code can have virtually any ending thanks to Microsoft hiding the "true" endings by default.

It works like this – the attachment has a double ending, say, *.jpg.exe*, but Windows and Windows applications show only *.jpg*, a harmless graphics format, unless you change the default setting.

Fix it now. Go to *My Computer/Tools/Folder Options* and look at the *Advanced Options*. Is "Hide known file extensions" ticked? If so, untick it. While you're there, also tick "Show hidden files and folders". This will ensure that any files added to your system by a worm writer can be seen in *Windows Explorer* and *My Computer* and that their true extensions are visible in your email client.

For further information on securing your email client against both email and email-borne viruses, you should go to <http://www.antivirus.about.com/library/blemail.htm> and look up your specific email program. This is especially true of *Outlook Express* and *Outlook*, as these have been major targets for writers of email viruses (i.e. viruses actually embedded in the text of an email and capable of spreading from there when you preview or view the message).

Some examples of email viruses are:

- BadTrans.B
- Nimda Worm
- HTML/Little Davinia
- VBS/Forgotten
- BleBla
- Kak
- BubbleBoy

Do it now, before you forget. Remember we can warn you, we can advise you what to do, but we cannot do it for you.

FURTHER REVAMPING OF THE WEBSITE

Thanks to some feedback, I have made some further changes to the website. The internal structure has also been reorganised, but that's something that shouldn't affect you – unless, of course, I have omitted something from the revised structure.

Some people would like to see more on the first page. Trouble is that people will not scroll far down the page to find things and so there is only a limited space that they will view. Others seem reluctant to click on buttons to find the information they want. Unfortunately, because of the amount of information stored on the website, it is necessary to click on a button, and, often, more than one, to reach all of it. However, there are also, where appropriate, direct links (look for underlined green pieces of text) that will save you going via the buttons.

I've installed an online version of the *Problem Log Form*, and tested it. If you plan to attend a meeting and raise your problem, please download and use the PDF version. You'll find it under *Getting help/Problem solver*. If you cannot get to a meeting, fill in and submit the online form and we'll get back to you.

If anyone has any ideas for online forms that could be added to the website, please email your thoughts to

the [Webmaster](#) and I'll see if I can incorporate your suggested form into the website so that all our members can use it.

MS OFFICE ON LINUX?

About a year ago Michael Robertson of Lindows.com speculated about future trends and made four predictions, two of which proved spot on, and two of which, while in the right general direction, missed the mark.

Among this year's four predictions, he has speculated that Microsoft could release MS Office to run on Linux.

That seems a pretty wild stab in the dark, but Bill Gates admitted recently that Linux wasn't going to go away. It also makes sense for Microsoft to sell applications to those who choose a different operating system. After all, they already do so for the Macintosh.

Mac's OS-X is a Unix-variant at heart and Linux is a Unix clone. Therefore porting from one to the other is not impossible. It has been done for OpenOffice, for example.

Will his prediction be anywhere near the mark? I don't think so, but my track record when it comes to predicting future trends is much worse than his. As I often say, "When it doesn't happen, remember you read it here first."

COREL TO RELAUNCH WORDPERFECT

Corel is relaunching the once-mighty WordPerfect brand, promising a "revitalised" WordPerfect Office 12 for next month.

Compatibility with the Microsoft Office applications has been made a priority. Corel has always offered support for Microsoft Office, but there was more work required to set it up. Now, Corel promises, for example, that WordPerfect users will be able to apply familiar Microsoft Office keyboard shortcuts to their documents. Component applications of the standard edition are WordPerfect word processor, Quattro Pro spreadsheet, Corel Presentations and some utilities. The Professional edition adds the Paradox database.

"WordPerfect is back!" said Amish Mehta, Corel CEO. "No office suite excites more passion than WordPerfect, and Corel is firmly committed to ensuring WordPerfect Office 12 is a tremendous success. Building on a base of over 18 million users worldwide, Corel will further expand its WordPerfect business to address the growing demand for alternative office suites within the consumer and small-to-medium sized (SMB) market. It's a new day at Corel and a new opportunity for both existing and prospective customers to experience the full benefits of an alternative office suite backed by one of the world's best recognized software developers."

SHOULD I OPEN THIS?

You've received an attachment that purports to come from a friend, but which you did not expect. Should you open it?

John James has come up with a good way of deciding. Check the text of the message. Does it sound like it came from your friend, or does it seem strange and unlikely to have come from him/her? If the latter, don't open it.

This simple, commonsense rule when added to your antivirus precautions should keep you pretty safe from malware-infected attachments.

For more information on Internet security, don't miss the meeting on Tuesday, 9 March 2004, when Robert

Crombie will discuss the precautions you should take.

UPGRADING YOUR COMPUTER

With the strong Australian dollar PC component prices have, in most cases, fallen since Christmas. As the dollar is now showing signs of weakening, prices may not continue to fall in the short time. As a result, now could well be a good time to improve your hardware. But how do you go about it?

Let's say that you have a computer running Windows 95 or 98 and have decided that the time has come to upgrade the CPU for a bit more speed. What do you need to get and what problems might you encounter?

First off I suggest you detail all the hardware you currently have. You can do this with Aida32, Belarc Adviser, FreshDiagnose, or a similar program. These can be obtained freely from the Internet. Personally I use Aida32 set up to run from a CD disc. That saves me installing it each time I want to find out about a computer.

Run the program and note what version of the operating system, what CPU you have, how much and what type of RAM, what size hard disk drive, and what type of video card. This will tell you something like: Windows 98, Celeron 400 CPU, 128 MB SDRAM, an AGP 2.0 video card, 8GB ATA33 hard disk drive, CDRW drive, CD-ROM drive, 1.44MB floppy disk drive.

Then pop over to our new Feature Article on the website and read how to decide which is the best way forward. In the article we outline the traps you could fall into and discuss the most economical approach to upgrade your computer.

<http://hobartpcgroup.org.au/files/feature/upgrading.htm>

GOOD BUY

Salamanca Systems have refurbished 15 inch monitors from \$45.00. Just the thing to put with that old computer you are trying to dispose of. They also have 600 MHz laptops for \$699, which sound like good buying.

Big W have Alco copy paper at under \$4.00 a ream. Why pay more? Ideal for laser, plain paper faxes, copiers and inkjets.

Want a Pentium 233 for a modest price? How about a Hewlett Packard 690C DeskJet for \$60? Contact Peter Campbell for further details.

If you need ink cartridges for a Lexmark, have a chat to Peter Campbell. He can now get Microjet-brand cartridges that have been refurbished in the US. They sell for around \$35 to \$40 depending on model. He can also get Microjet cartridges for Sharp, Brother and Xerox inkjets, as well as HP, Canon and Epson. These cartridges are full of quality ink and snap straight in as easily as a brand name cartridge. No mess, no fuss, and much cheaper.

Do you know of any bargains around town? Let me know so that I can pass the details on.

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Editor: Peter Campbell, C/-Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.,
PO Box 563, Rosny Park Tas 7018, Australia.

Phone: (03) 6234 4691.

Email: editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au.

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